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ABSTRACT

Information was collected at six urban high schools in the Northwest during 1984 and 1985 to describe the procedures used to manage student absenteeism and to compare the schools on staff implementation of and satisfaction with the absentee procedures used. An additional purpose was to investigate the influence of school procedures on student absence rates. Four major procedures were identified: monitoring and recording attendance, excusing absences, imposing penalties for unexcused absences, and intervening in patterns of chronic absenteeism. The evidence suggests that a centralized computer system for monitoring and recording attendance should be combined with school-based microcomputer systems for short-term monitoring and feedback. Questionnaires revealed that many teachers are frustrated by the responsibility of excusing student absences and are dissatisfied with parents' adherence to predefined criteria for excuses. Penalties imposed for unexcused absences appear to be most effective with students who are college-oriented. Intervention in cases of chronic truancy is controversial and at best only sporadic. The approach that is advocated for managing student absenteeism is to combine increased strictness with more ambitious interventions into the problems of the chronic truants, including efforts to improve teaching quality and make classes more interesting or relevant. Questionnaires are appended. (GJ)

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High School Procedures for Managing Student Absenteeism: Staff Implementation and Satisfaction and Student Response

by
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March 1986

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I. Introduction

This paper reports results from a two-year study of student absenteeism in the high school. We present descriptive information about the policies and procedures used to manage absenteeism in six high schools, the working relationships among administrators, counselors, and teachers created thereby, and prevalent notions about how the management of absenteeism might be improved. What kinds of work are occasioned by the necessity of managing absenteeism, and how do schools vary in their management of that work? In order to expand the limited literature on how high schools manage attendance (Brodow 1979), we devote considerable space to describing what school people do and identifying variations in procedures that may relate to variations in staff implementation and satisfaction. We focus on differences among the six high schools and on changes between the two years of the study.

The paper also presents evidence regarding student compliance with school rules on attendance. While we are cautious about inferring a cause and effect relationship between school procedures and student compliance, we are alert to indications in the data that some management procedures may be more effective than others. We treat student compliance in this paper as a school-level variable and relate differences in school statistics on student compliance to differences in school management variables. Separate papers stemming from the two-year study address the question of what factors influence variation in individual student absence within a school (Duckworth and deJung 1986) and the question of what course characteristics and teacher practices are associated with variation in class absence rates within a school (deJung and Duckworth 1986).

Student absenteeism comprises various phenomena. Most simply, absenteeism refers to a pattern of absences from school. Schools are required to maintain records of who attends school, and furthermore it is in their interest to do so because absences for any reason are an inconvenience to the school's programs. Hence a study of absenteeism would be incomplete without describing and comparing school management procedures for monitoring and recording attendance and for excusing absences, and we do both here. Our special concern, however, is with unexcused absences--"skipping" whole days of school or "cutting" particular classes without acceptable reasons. Skipping and cutting typically require a series of organizational procedures beyond the simple noting of absence. Those procedures include applying penalties for unexcused absences and working to correct patterns of chronic unexcused absence.

Districts set policies regarding procedures for excusing absences, authorized penalties, and requirements for record keeping. Schools develop their own procedures for managing absenteeism within these constraints. Management procedures are usually thought of as a series of responsibilities and actions, although managing absenteeism in reality includes concurrent as well as consecutive processes.

There are several policy issues involved in these management procedures, and we intend to demonstrate how the experience of the schools in this study suggests implications for resolving those issues.

The policy issue currently being debated regarding monitoring and recording attendance is determining the appropriate strategy for using computers to maintain records. This issue involves questions of the balance of workload among central office personnel, school administrators and counselors, and teachers.

The perennial issue regarding excusing absences is what excuses are

acceptable. Many argue that only serious illness or injury should excuse a student's absence. Others feel students should be excused for family trips because of their educational value, for special events and performances because of community interest, and for dental and cosmetic appointments in the interest of family convenience. A third group argues that the school should cease trying to differentiate excused from unexcused absences and instead should present a program that the student must complete in order to earn course credit or stay enrolled.

With respect to imposing penalties for unexcused absences, there has always been a legal debate about the school's right to detain a student after school hours or to deprive the student of course credit or even school enrollment. These legal issues are compounded by pragmatic considerations regarding the balance of workload between teachers and administrators in applying penalties to students and regarding the effectiveness of penalties in deterring or eliminating absenteeism.

Finally, with respect to reforming chronic absentees, there is the issue of what and how much the school should and can do beyond imposing penalties. Here the relationship of school to home, implicit in many of the above procedures, becomes explicit. The role of the counselor also comes to the forefront, especially as the school attempts to intervene in negative behavior that may have roots outside school and that may involve wider social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse.

As will become evident, these issue were of central concern to personnel in the schools under study. We hope to draw on their experience and on data obtained in their schools to shed light on some of the alternative solutions to these problems and their impact on students, teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Research Procedures

The information reported in this paper was gathered from six high schools during the 1983-84 and 1984-85 school years. For brevity's sake and because the bulk of our data were collected during the second half of each school year, we generally refer to the first year as "1984" and the second year as "1985."

The schools in the study were selected from two urban districts in the western United States. District 1 was in a large city. From this district's ten high schools we selected three that served low-income student populations. Three additional high schools were selected from another district, District 2, which was in a medium-sized city in the same state. One of the state universities was located in this city, which included a wide range of socioeconomic groups, from a substantial unemployed group to a professional group. We studied three of this district's four high schools, and these schools served the full range of socioeconomic groups included in District 2. While the six schools served different clienteles, none of the schools could be called "embattled;" none presented the devastating problems of absenteeism encountered in inner-city schools in some large cities. Nor did any of the six schools serve a very large proportion of ethnic minority students. The largest proportion in any one school was 25 percent at one of the District 1 schools; most of these students were Asian-American.

While the schools are grouped by district for reporting findings, it is important to remember that the District 1 schools did not constitute a representative sample of schools in that district. We purposely selected schools that would be comparable to District 2 schools in serving largely Caucasian student bodies but that enrolled more students from low-income groups than were present in District 2. Thus the schools selected in

District 1 had relatively higher absenteeism than schools serving more affluent areas in that district.

Our initial contacts with school personnel, during the winter of the 1983-84 school year, involved comprehensive interviews with key administrators, who subsequently furnished us with school documents and forms detailing procedures for managing absenteeism. Then, in late April and early May of 1984, we administered questionnaires to all administrators concerned with managing absenteeism and to all teachers and students in the six schools. In addition, we interviewed selected counselors, teachers, and students regarding the implementation of school procedures and desirable changes.

A second wave of data was collected during the following school year. During the first year we had experienced unanticipated delays in obtaining data. To avoid jeopardizing completion of the project on schedule, we advanced the time of major data collection from spring to winter. Hence questionnaires were readministered (with slight modifications) to all teachers and students in late February and early March, 1985. Rather than reinterview teachers, we included an extra page on which they might describe school policy changes during the current year and make recommendations for improving attendance. Finally in the spring of 1985, we reinterviewed administrators in all schools regarding the year's history of policy changes and their apparent effects.

Questionnaires are included in Appendices C and D. Because questionnaire data are more fully analyzed in the companion papers mentioned above, we refer the reader to those papers for more detailed accounts of questionnaire development and administration as well as the rationale for restricting analyses of questionnaire data to full-time students and full-time teachers of regular school subjects.

Characteristics of Schools in the Sample

Before looking at our findings regarding absenteeism, it is useful to present a general overview of the characteristics of these schools. In reporting the results of this study, we use fictitious names for all six schools. We named the three District 1 schools after American Presidents with names beginning with A, B, and C--Adams, Buchanan, and Coolidge. We gave the three District 2 schools place names beginning with D, E, and F--Dearborn, Englewood, and Fairweather. All six schools were four-year, comprehensive high schools.

Students and Parents. The schools differed in size and socioeconomic makeup of the student body. As Table I-1 shows, Adams was the smallest with 957 students in 1984 while Fairweather was largest with 1578 students in 1984.

The response rate at each school is shown in Table 1-1, along with the final sizes of the student samples after we eliminated part-time students. Our main comparative measures of socioeconomic status come from the student questionnaire. These were limited to parents' education and expectations and students' part-time employment. As shown in Table I-1, the percentage of students reporting in 1984 that at least one of their parents had graduated from college varied from 15 percent at Adams to 71 percent at Fairweather. The pattern of differences among schools was repeated in 1985. Similar patterns are observable in the percentage of students reporting that their parents expected them to go to college. To obtain a (negative) measure of economic status, we asked students how many hours they worked each week at a part-time job. The percentage of students reporting that they worked at least 20 hours a week at a job (and thus held half-time jobs) ranged from 17 percent at Fairweather to 35 percent at Adams. The school means on these

Table I-1
Student Enrollments, Status, and Response Rates in the Six Schools
(Percentage of students selecting questionnaire responses and mean* of student responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
31. How far did your parents go in school?	% grad.coll.:	(84)	15	19	39	30	52	71
		(85)	15	20	41	32	50	73
	mean:	(84)	2.30	2.48	2.93	2.80	3.23	3.57
		(85)	2.36	2.50	2.97	2.87	3.23	3.60
25. What do your parents expect you to do after high school?	% 4-yr.coll.:	(84)	41	46	63	52	66	74
		(85)	42	47	63	55	64	74
	mean:	(84)	2.89	2.94	3.28	3.05	3.35	3.44
		(85)	2.90	2.95	3.28	3.14	3.29	3.46
26. How many hours do you work each week on a part-time job?	% 20 hrs.+:	(84)	35	28	26	21	19	17
		(85)	34	30	27	23	22	16
	mean:	(84)	2.39	2.20	2.09	1.97	1.96	1.81
		(85)	2.38	2.23	2.22	2.02	2.02	1.82
Index of student-reported status (31+25-26)		(84)	2.80	3.12	4.12	3.88	4.42	5.20
		(85)	2.88	3.22	4.03	3.99	4.50	5.24
Total no. of students enrolled		(84)	957	1006	1259	1209	1262	1578
		(85)	934	1026	1330	1135	1155	1444
No. of students returning questionnaires		(84)	785	858	945	1101	1112	1302
		(85)	788	836	1025	944	953	1280
Response rate:		(84)	82	85	75	91	88	82
		(85)	84	81	77	83	83	89
No. of students retained in questionnaire sample		(84)	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
		(85)	755	792	967	916	906	1246

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
31: 1=less than h.s.; 2=h.s. grad; 3=att. coll.; 4=grad. coll.
25: 1=no plans; 2=job or other plans; 3=2-yr. coll. or voc. prog; 4=4-yr. coll.
26: 1=no job; 2=<10 hrs.; 3=10 hrs.; 4=20 hrs.; 5=>20 hrs.

three measures, which are a more appropriate single statistic for comparing schools than percentages selecting specific responses, exhibited the same pattern as percentages. Because the analyses to be reported will be facilitated by the availability of a summary score on socioeconomic status, we added the means on parents' education and expectations and then subtracted the mean on hours worked. The resulting scores are shown as the index of student-reported socioeconomic status in Table I-1. On the basis of these scores, we would order the schools on student-reported socioeconomic status as follows, from high to low:

Fairweather
Englewood
Coolidge
Dearborn
Buchanan
Adams

Because the school means on parental education and expectations, although not on number of hours worked, were higher at Coolidge than Dearborn, Coolidge obtained a higher overall score on the status index. With this exception, the ordering of schools from left to right in the tables exhibits an ascending scale on this index.

This ordering was largely confirmed by two pieces of evidence not shown in Table I-1. First, the pattern of percentages of students at each school reporting that the reason they worked was to pay for "basic needs like clothing," as opposed to other reasons, was very similar to the ordering above. Second, teacher responses to a questionnaire item about the percentage of their students who were likely to go to college exhibited the same pattern across schools as student responses. One exception to this overall ranking, however, is worth mentioning. A District 2 report indicated that the median family income at Fairweather was lower than that of Englewood (and equivalent to Dearborn's). Fairweather, nonetheless, had a higher score

on the status index because, serving many children of university professors, the school had the most educationally ambitious community in District 2.

Open and Closed Campuses. The six schools differed in physical layout, reflecting their different dates of construction and current environments. The three District 1 schools were traditional two-story high school buildings in which there were only a few main doors through which students could enter or exit. The three District 2 schools were all one-story structures that seemed more "open" to their environments than the District 1 schools. Dearborn and Fairweather were organized around long hallways. Englewood, the newest of the schools, was organized in a cluster manner; for the school office and for each department there were separate buildings connected by covered walkways.

The school policies on boundary maintenance (that is, whether the campus was "open" or "closed") corresponded to the architectural differences. All three District 1 schools had closed campuses--students were not allowed in the halls without a hall pass. District 2 schools varied with respect to the open/closed campus issue. Dearborn in 1984 officially had "closed halls" during the day, which meant that students were expected to be in classes or study areas every period, although there was no requirement that students have hall passes. Unlike other schools in District 2, students were scheduled into classes every period. In years past, the school had had an open campus like the two remaining District 2 schools, but some time earlier this had been abandoned for the present system. Nonetheless in 1985, a new administrator described the past year as "chaos in the corridors" and claimed to have finally "closed" the halls.

The other two District 2 schools had open campuses. Englewood also had an extended school day (i.e., classes ran during the "last" time period of the teacher's day, which was a teacher prep time at the other schools)

with two free periods when students were expected to study or do homework. The emphasis was on students taking responsibility for using the resources of the school. Fairweather had an open campus and provided one free period during a regular--rather than extended--school day. Fairweather also emphasized students' responsibility for their own decisions and in fact had evolved what was described as a "junior-college" atmosphere.

Administrative Structure. The administrative responsibility for managing absenteeism in each school generally was delegated to a vice-principal. In District 1 schools, the responsibility was further divided in 1984 by student gender (Adams), by alphabetical groupings (Buchanan), and by grade levels (Coolidge), although one vice-principal at each school had the main responsibility. At Englewood and Fairweather, despite their large student populations, one vice-principal had total responsibility for absenteeism. Dearborn was a special case in 1984, when the principal and three assistant principals all shared responsibility, each taking a particular grade. In 1985, one assistant principal assumed total responsibility there as well.

At Adams, the vice-principals for attendance were responsible for monitoring the halls, and an aide had been hired to assist in that purpose. At Buchanan, the same situation prevailed officially, but efforts at monitoring had been relaxed during the year. At Coolidge, teachers were assigned the responsibility of monitoring the halls. At Dearborn, administrators were expected to patrol halls periodically. As mentioned, Englewood and Fairweather were open campuses and had no hall patrol.

There were personnel changes in many of the key administrative positions in these schools in 1984-85, and the new office-holders often reported new efforts to reduce absenteeism. At Adams, the junior vice-principal for attendance took over from the senior vice-principal, who

moved to another school. Also, the curriculum vice-principal became principal. At Buchanan, the senior vice-principal retired and his replacement assumed his portion of the absenteeism monitoring responsibilities. Coolidge also acquired a new principal in 1985, and the vice-principal for attendance, nearing retirement, relinquished some of his responsibilities to a new vice-principal. Dearborn acquired both a new principal and an assistant principal for attendance in 1985. Only Englewood and Fairweather exhibited relative stability in administrative personnel across the two years.

Teachers. The teaching faculties of the schools differed somewhat. The numbers of teachers were of course proportional to the size of the student body--from approximately 45 teachers at Adams to approximately 75 teachers at Fairweather. Table I-2 shows the number of teachers retained in the questionnaire sample. In each school, we restricted the questionnaire sample to teachers of regular classroom subjects (excluding teachers of a variety of specialties, such as English as a second language and special education). To restrict the sample to full-time teachers, we also omitted from the sample teachers who reported that they taught less than four classes a day; unfortunately, the rule also eliminated some department chairs who taught only three classes a day.

Table I-2 presents the number of years teachers had been at their current school. Interestingly, about a third of the teachers at each District 2 school were in their first or second year at their current school. This would appear to indicate inordinate turnover at those schools; rather, however, District 2 had reorganized its secondary schools in 1984 and had added the ninth grade to each high school. This change, of course, was of considerable importance for the management of absenteeism, because it meant that all three District 2 schools were dealing with a third more students

Table I-2
Characteristics of Teachers in the Six Schools
(Percentage of teachers selecting questionnaire responses and mean* of teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
1. Years teaching in current school	% 10 yrs. or more:	(84)	36	62	55	41	40	38
		(85)	35	63	46	45	29	29
	% 2 yrs. at most:	(84)	17	15	13	37	35	31
		(85)	16	9	31	34	38	40
	mean:	(84)	3.69	4.13	3.92	3.31	3.35	3.35
		(85)	3.60	4.23	3.52	3.53	3.22	3.15
2. Years teaching in all	% 10 yrs. or more:	(84)	71	79	83	86	87	86
		(85)	74	84	78	88	90	92
	mean:	(84)	4.62	4.60	4.68	4.82	4.82	4.86
		(85)	4.58	4.70	4.56	4.81	4.88	4.83
Gender	% male:	(84)	52	64	66	59	68	61
		(85)	44	63	63	62	62	60
Subject area	% core acad. subj.:	(84)	59	47	60	64	59	66
		(85)	53	60	59	62	60	63
Number of teachers retained in questionnaire sample		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	58	64

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
1,2: 1=< 1 yr.; 2=1-2 yrs.; 3=3-5 yr.; 4=6-9 yrs.; 5=10+ yrs.

than in the past. Of the District 1 schools, Adams had fewer (36 percent) teachers than Buchanan (62 percent) or Coolidge (55 percent) who had been in their school for ten or more years. This suggests that Adams had higher teacher turnover.

Table I-2 also shows that male teachers were in the majority at each school, with the sole exception of Adams in 1985. The distribution of teachers across subject areas was in general similar across schools. The percentage of teachers in core academic subject areas--English, math, science, social studies, and foreign languages--stayed about the same in both years. It varied only at Buchanan, where it was higher in 1985, and Adams, where it was lower in 1985. There were slight changes in the makeup of the sample between 1984 and 1985.

Overview of the Report

We now turn to our findings regarding absenteeism in the six schools. In Section II, we describe and compare each school's management procedures for taking attendance and differentiating excused absences from unexcused. Then in Section III, we describe and compare procedures for dealing with unexcused absences and staff satisfaction with procedures. The students' perspective on school management procedures is introduced in Section IV, which also presents data on school rates of absence. Finally, Section V reviews the findings and draws implications for school improvement.

II. Monitoring Attendance and Identifying Unexcused Absences

Managing problems in student absenteeism depends on the school's ability to identify such problems quickly. This ability depends on the efficiency of procedures for monitoring and recording attendance. This ability also depends on the efficiency of procedures for excusing or clearing

absences and thus identifying those absences that disregard or defy school policies and procedures. We describe how each of the six schools accomplished these functions, and we identify variations among schools and changes in the 1985 school year that raise questions about the effectiveness of procedures.

Monitoring and Recording Attendance

Given the large numbers of students served by each of these high schools, the efficient monitoring of attendance and recording of absences posed difficult problems for school administrators. The issue on many people's minds was whether computer systems for monitoring and recording would solve these problems. The type of computer system being introduced varied among the schools, and there were important changes going on at several schools.

District 1 had developed and implemented a computerized system of recording and reporting attendance for each period of the school day. This system was in its second year of operation during the first year of the study--the school year ending in 1984. The district provided each school with a computer terminal and an attendance secretary to enter data. The district printed lists of class enrollment for each class, each period, on a weekly basis. Each day, teachers would check the names of those students who were not in class and send the form to the attendance office. The teacher would also enter a record of absence in a gradebook, which was the official record. Each grading period, teachers were given class Scantron forms to report total absences for each student, along with the course grade. Both were transferred at the district office to the student's report card.

During the second year of the study--the school year ending in 1985--District 1 schools continued with the centralized computer system and began

also to provide daily class Scantron sheets in order to eliminate the need for typing all absences onto the school's computer terminal.

For Adams and Buchanan High Schools, the new district system was the only system for daily monitoring of attendance. In contrast, Coolidge High also retained an older system of recording attendance in the 1984 school year in addition to the newer computer system. Thus, in addition to the period-by-period computer forms, Coolidge had the registration period--or "reg"--teacher take daily attendance and send a report to the office each day. Likewise, each teacher received a listing of which students had checked in or checked out each day and was to submit a list of referrals for class cutting weekly to the office. In the following 1985 school year, Coolidge finally gave up its older, school-based system and began posting computer listings of absent students instead, although its use of Scantron forms began only in February, 1985, the month the second questionnaire was administered. It was apparent from Coolidge teachers' responses to the open-ended question about policy changes that this shift had brought the computerized system to their attention; despite our evidence that the school had been collecting computerized data during the 1984 school year, 18 teachers mentioned this as a change in the current year on the 1985 questionnaire. Hardly any teachers at Adams or Buchanan mentioned the computerized system as an innovation in the 1985 school year.

Thus District 1 schools exhibit the gradual consolidation and improvement of a district-based computerized system for monitoring period-by-period absences each day.

District 2 lacked a centralized computing system for recording and analyzing absenteeism on a period-by-period basis. Instead, the district required that schools keep files on each student's attendance. Although these files were kept in the school office, the teacher's gradebook was the

official record, as in District 1. District 2 had contracted with a private agency to provide limited computer services. The agency obtained reports of whole-day and half-day absences per student and could provide summaries of these upon request, but no accounting of period-by-period absences was done by the agency during the two years of the study. Thus schools were on their own with respect to daily monitoring of absence and, especially, class cutting.

The general trend during these two years in District 2 was the introduction of school-based microcomputer systems to monitor period-by-period absences. Since Fairweather initiated such a system first, we discuss that school's procedures as a backdrop for discussion of the subsequent Dearborn and Englewood experiments.

The policy at Fairweather was in a state of flux during the 1984 school year as the school attempted to institute a new system of attendance recording using an Apple computer. There was considerable attention being given to producing accurate data. By spring, when we collected questionnaire data, the procedure was to use a Scantron sheet for each teacher and each class. The teacher would send the form to the office to be read by a Scantron machine connected to the Apple. Within 10 minutes after receiving the forms, the office could provide a listing of students who had missed each period. The practice was to prepare a report at the end of the first period, at the end of the fourth period, and at the end of the day. During the following school year, Fairweather continued using and improving its system. Thirteen Fairweather teachers mentioned the computer system as an innovation during the current year on the 1985 questionnaire, and they may have been referring to those improvements.

In contrast to Fairweather, during the 1984 school year, Dearborn and Englewood both used manual recording of absences at the end of the day.

Perhaps because of Fairweather's success, both schools experimented during the 1985 school year with microcomputer systems. Hence they provide instances of policy change between the two years of the study.

Under the manual recording system, Dearborn teachers turned in roll sheets of absences at the end of each day. The attendance secretary transferred information from these roll sheets to individual students' attendance cards. In the fall term of the 1985 school year, Dearborn installed a microcomputer system similar in general design to Fairweather's, but with different equipment and software. Dearborn dropped this system at the end of a term because of time demands on office personnel and its slow feedback of essential information. During this period, the older manual system had been allowed to lapse and had to be reinstituted in winter term.

Under the manual recording system at Englewood, class attendance reports were picked up from each teacher each period. These reports were taken to the attendance secretary who with the help of student workers transferred the information to individual students' attendance cards by hand. The reports were then discarded and the attendance cards retained for several years. At the beginning of the 1985 school year, Englewood installed the same microcomputer system that Dearborn had installed and experienced similar problems. Unlike Dearborn, however, Englewood switched to different equipment rather than abandoning the effort. The revised system at Englewood had been functioning for only a short time before the questionnaire was readministered, but the administrator described it as efficient.

Teachers responding to the questionnaire reflected this difference in school experience. Eleven teachers at Englewood mentioned the new system as a policy change. Only four Dearborn teachers, however, mentioned the computer system as a policy change, and they described it as a failure.

Thus District 2 schools exhibited three different stages of

introduction of school-based microcomputer systems to monitor attendance. Fairweather had a system in place (although still with problems) before the 1984 questionnaire was administered. Englewood had a system in place (briefly) before the 1985 questionnaire was administered. Dearborn had tried a system but reverted to its previous procedures between the two questionnaire administration dates.

How did staff members at the six schools perceive their monitoring systems? Our information comes from interviews with administrators both years, from teacher interviews in 1984, and from teacher responses to a question on policy changes in 1985.

The central office computer system in District 1 seemed to be implemented in the main by the three schools, although administrators voiced complaints that some teachers were irregular in filling out the forms to be recorded by the computer. When we compared data taken from these forms with data from teachers' reports of student absences on report cards, we found that the latter source (despite its own evident gaps) gave higher estimates of absenteeism than the computer system; this suggests that indeed teachers were irregular in filling out computer forms. Despite evidence of inconsistent reporting, however, few teachers interviewed had major complaints about the system. Only at Coolidge, where the older system of reporting survived alongside the computerized system, did a teacher complain that work had increased.

Although teachers had few complaints, they were less enthusiastic than administrators about the informational value of the computerized system. Administrators generally enjoyed their ability to call up quickly listings of absences by individual student. Teachers, however, complained that feedback to them was slow. At Adams, some teachers reported that it was difficult to find out whether a student who had missed their class had been out the whole

day.

In District 2, there were no complaints about the manual systems of recording used at Dearborn and Englewood. At Fairweather, there was general enthusiasm about the final state of the new school-based microcomputer system. Fairweather teachers' enthusiasm was for the very aspect of the system that displeased Adams teachers: its speed. At Fairweather, teachers could find out quickly whether a missing student was out for the day or had been absent from only one class. The turnaround time for this information was quicker than in District 1. However, one counselor continued to keep a chart of absences for his students, and he felt that the new system still lacked the software to provide the information he compiled manually.

Although there continued to be a thrust towards computerization (particularly in connection with notifying parents of absences, to be described below), there was also an undercurrent of frustration and skepticism in administrators' comments in interviews and in teachers' questionnaire comments the second year. Many mentioned the time burdens of operating such systems. Some also questioned the utility and timeliness of the resulting information. More disturbing were suggestions of unreliability in the data, evident in anecdotes about student workers or attendance clerks who changed teachers' reports, sometimes to correct mistakes, but sometimes in response to students' requests.

Does whether monitoring is district-based or school-based affect the conscientiousness with which teachers record attendance? The teacher questionnaire asked teachers if they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "I am concerned to be as accurate as possible in my daily attendance records." In both years, nearly all teachers in each school agreed with this statement. Small differences in the percentages of teachers <u>strongly</u> agreeing with the statement were noted across schools:

	1984	1985
Adams	78	86
Buchanan	87	81
Coolidge	72	71
Dearborn	82	72
Englewood	59	62
Fairweather	61	63

Overall, District 1 teachers were more likely to agree strongly with the statement than District 2 teachers, which may suggest that a centralized computer system motivates teachers to be accurate. In 1984, in District 1, the percentage strongly agreeing was highest at Buchanan; in District 2, the highest school was Dearborn. In 1985, there was little evidence that the new school-based system at Englewood or the continued use of the system at Fairweather increased the strength of teachers' concern to be accurate. The decline in the percentage of teachers strongly agreeing at Dearborn may reflect their unsuccessful attempt to install a microcomputer system. No teacher at that school actually disagreed with the statement, however.

In summary, although the school-based computer system for monitoring attendance and recording absences in District 2 seemed more responsive to teacher needs than the central-office computer system in the District 1 schools, there was no evidence that a school-based system was also superior in terms of increased teacher conscientiousness. Furthermore, the process of installing such a school-based system is fraught with obstacles, and the experience of all three District 2 schools suggests that at least a year of experimentation and modification may be necessary to find the system that meets one's needs. During that year, the school may experience a decrease of efficiency. We discovered that Dearborn virtually "lost" a term's information on attendance during the unsuccessful experiment with a microcomputer. This experience suggests that Coolidge's strategy of continuing the pre-existing procedures for recording attendance in addition to experimenting with a new system may be wise, despite the teachers'

complaints of double duty. The question of the effectiveness of these systems will be raised again when we present data on teacher satisfaction at the end of Section III.

Excusing Absences

Once absences were recorded, the next management task was to distinguish acceptable absences from unacceptable. In general, all schools required parental excuses, but schools differed in how they processed these and in how they responded when excuses were not promptly provided.

First, schools differed in the designated recipient of the excuse. At Adams, students brought their excuses directly to the teacher of each class missed. A teacher was also the designated recipient at Coolidge, although there it was the "reg" period teacher, who prepared admittance slips for other classes missed. In contrast to both Adams and Coolidge, the recipient of the excuse at Buchanan was not the teacher but one of the vice-principals, who supplied the admittance slips necessary for returning to classes missed. Dearborn and Englewood also required students to bring excuses to the attendance office, although they did not issue or require admittance slips. Finally, Fairweather was like Adams in designating the individual teacher as the recipient of excuses. In 1984, Fairweather required admittance slips, which were issued by the office, but the school dropped this requirement in 1985. In sum, Buchanan exhibited the greatest administrative control of the excusing process, followed by Dearborn and Englewood. Coolidge, however, did centralize the process on the "reg" teacher rather than allowing individual teacher discretion in judging the excuses they received. Adams and Fairweather seemed to allow the greatest teacher latitude.

Administrative control of the process of excusing absences was

enhanced at District 2 schools by the greater access there to records regarding unexcused absences. The District 1 computer system for recording absences did not code absences as excused or unexcused. The excuse was recorded only in the teacher's grade book. Thus administrators there could obtain computer summaries only of overall absences. In contrast, school records in District 2 were coded to distinguish excused from unexcused absences. This had always been true of the older card system; it was also true of the new microcomputer systems. Thus administrators at Fairweather and Englewood, where the new system had been successfully installed, could obtain computer summaries of unexcused absences.

The schools also differed on the deadline for excuses. To have an absence excused, students in District 1 were required to bring excuses within three days. Buchanan reduced this to 48 hours if the student was to avoid penalties. District 2 schools differed in the deadline for excuses. All of the District 2 schools, however, seemed to us to place greater emphasis than District 1 schools on obtaining excuses prior to absences. School notices encouraged parents to phone the school when the student would not be attending. If parents called by 9:30 a.m., the student's name was placed on the daily list of excused absences that was sent to all teachers. Regardless of parental calling, a follow-up note was required. The deadline was two days at Dearborn and Fairweather but five days at Englewood--the longest amount of time allowed at any school in the sample.

Finally, schools also differed in how they responded when excuses were not promptly provided. Responses involving penalties and intensive action are described below in Section III. The most immediate response was effort on the school's part to obtain an excuse. One of the most prominent and--to school personnel involved--significant innovations during our study, especially in the second year, was the increase in routine, daily contacting

of parents to inform them that their children had been absent but that no excuse had been received.

Although Adams administrators had given little indication of a concerted effort to notify parents about absences promptly in 1984, in 1985 an automatic dialing machine with a taped message was installed. Using a computer printout, a secretary would type into the dialing machine the phone numbers of the homes of students who had been absent each day, and the machine would call their parents during the evening. The vice-principal remarked that 25 percent of the school's students had no phones, which limited the effectiveness of this procedure. We had no information about the effects of this innovation, because it did not become fully operational until after the administration of the 1985 questionnaire. The administrators seemed satisfied with the effort.

Of the other schools, only Fairweather installed a similar automated dialing system, and, like Adams, it did so in 1985; also as at Adams, the system was not in full operation until after administration of the 1985 questionnaire. In 1984, Fairweather had hired a person to call parents of students who were absent first period without an excuse. That person was able to reach only a fraction of the parents. Under the new automated system in 1985, all parents were called. Unlike Adams' system, Fairweather's dialing machine was linked to microcomputer records of absences, which included phone numbers. Thus it was not necessary for Fairweather office personnel to type in phone numbers, and the calling process could begin more promptly.

Although none of the other four schools experimented with such a system, personnel at three of these schools reported increased efforts to notify parents. During both years, Buchanan used money from a district grant to hire community college students to call parents of students absent for

three consecutive days. This strategy limited the number of parents to be called. Even so, the vice-principal reported that the school was able to contact only a portion of the parents on the list. Dearborn attempted to have school office personnel call parents, and the new assistant principal in 1985 reported increased efforts to do so, but limitations in personnel available resulted in the school's reaching only a small percentage of the cases. At Englewood, the procedure in 1984 was for the attendance secretary to call parents of students missing two or more periods each day without a prior excuse. In 1985, Englewood organized parent volunteers to make the calls; these additional resources, added to the quicker generation of lists of parents to be called by the new microcomputer systems, resulted in the school reaching nearly all parents. In contrast to these efforts, at Coolidge there were no provisions either year for calling parents on a regular basis.

The involvement of administrators in the process of excusing absences, through direct inspection of excuses or management of the daily notification of parents, had important consequences for the monitoring and recording functions as well. In addition to the reactive aspect of their roles in adjudicating disputes over excuses regarded as problematic by clerks or teachers, the administrators' role developed proactive aspects as well. They developed lists of students who, because of phony excuses or repeated failure to provide an excuse, looked deserving of closer monitoring in the future. For example, Dearborn administrators each year screened attendance records and compiled lists of 100-150 students for weekly monitoring. In 1985, the Englewood assistant principal did likewise. Thus the monitoring procedure acquires an additional organizational layer as personnel anticipate and look for evidence of chronic absenteeism. Daily reports, which by their sheer volume prohibit routine analysis, are scanned to find students on the

administrator's "list."

Similarly, communicating with parents to verify excuses widened the net of monitoring by alerting parents to behavior of their children they otherwise might not have known about. How parents responded to this information was not a concern in this excusing process, although there were school efforts, to be described below, that attempted to shape parental responses.

In all, differentiating between excused and unexcused absences was a major problem. Teachers interviewed at all schools found it difficult consistently to distinguish acceptable excuses. There was widespread suspicion of forged excuses. Teachers also resented parental collusion in sending phony excuses or excuses for what teachers regarded as frivolous activities, like getting haircuts. Furthermore, some teachers resented other teachers for overlooking absences rather than requiring excuses. One vice-principal complained that teachers varied in how long they would wait for an excuse. On the other hand, there were some teachers who resented administrators for the regimentation of the excusing procedures (and indeed of the monitoring and recording procedures as well).

Where excuses had to be cleared by the office, this created problems for teachers. In general, district policies required teachers to provide makeup work only for excused absences. When office clearance was slow, the teacher was put in the bind of either giving timely makeup work where it was not deserved or of withholding makeup work from legitimate cases. Englewood teachers, where the time allowed for clearance was greatest (five days), were the most upset about this problem.

A commonly-expressed solution was to drop the distinction altogether. Several teachers interviewed said that in their classes, "an absence is an absence." Englewood teachers were particularly emphatic about this. Some

argued that the school should simply require all missed work to be made up or, in the event of an excessive number of absences, the class to be repeated. On the other hand, some teachers alleged that unnamed colleagues treated all absences alike by never requiring makeup work, with the result that students received the impression that no one cared if they skipped. Furthermore, many interviewees were aware of the problems that would be created by such equation of all absences: if no excuses were accepted, parents would demand lenience for their children if they missed work because of illness; if all excuses were accepted, teachers would balk at providing makeup work (and inevitably tutoring) for all students who were absent. Nonetheless, teacher questionnaire comments in 1985 continued to recommend the policy: "an absence is an absence." An average of 10 teachers per school (25 percent of those respondents who nominated any changes) nominated such a policy.

In sum, the procedures for excusing absences have taken us into the area of teacher, counselor, and administrator judgment and have revealed all the organizational problems that arise when a plurality of actors make judgments about the same matter. The incorporation of the excusing process into the microcomputer systems of Englewood and Fairweather seemed likely to bring those problems to a head. On the one hand, this tension may increase pressure to eliminate the excusing process altogether. On the other hand, it may activate and sharpen judgmental powers that can then be employed in a more aggressive strategy to reduce unexcused absences. We shall recall these issues when we look in Section III at data on staff implementation of school procedures for responding to unexcused absences and on staff satisfaction with school procedures for managing absenteeism in general.

III. School Responses to Unexcused Absences

We have thus far focused on routine management procedures for maintaining school attendance records and for excusing absences as provided by law and regulation. The identification of unexcused absences documents the extent of violation of law and regulation. The accumulation of such unexcused absences leads to student disenrollment, which is a serious matter for school administrators as well as students. Furthermore, unexcused absences constitute willful disruption of the instructional program. Hence considerable effort was expended in responses to unexcused absences by school personnel. This section describes that effort and compares the six schools.

First, it can be said that unexcused absences were a cause of concern in all six schools. The 1984 administrator and teacher questionnaires asked whether respondents considered class cutting a problem in their schools. Of the 20 administrators responding to the questionnaire, all but one agreed that it was. Similarly, in each school 85 percent or more of the responding teachers agreed that class cutting was a problem in their school. Thus all schools experienced problems. How did they handle them?

Once an absence had been recorded as unexcused, and initial contacts with the parent had failed to "clear" it, each of the schools proceeded to impose a series of escalating penalties. The main penalties for unexcused absences included detention, academic penalties like reduction of grade and withdrawal from a course, suspension, and disenrollment. The procedures for imposing these penalties varied among schools. Even more pronounced was the variation in interim measures and corrective actions taken along the road to disenrollment. For no schools used their penalties automatically.

As in our discussion of procedures for recording and excusing absences, we will draw on a variety of sources of information to describe

each school's procedures in the 1984 school year and any change that took place in the 1985 school year. We have more teacher questionnaire data regarding school response to unexcused absences than we had on monitoring and excusing. We use this data to develop summary indices for comparing schools and for identifying change across the two years. With only six schools, there is little point in more elaborate statistical analyses, and we will be content to treat any relationships we detect as conjectural, meriting further research on a larger sample.

Imposing Detention

The most obvious response to an unexcused absence is requiring the student to make up the time. Most commonly this was done after school, and the limit was a half hour. Individual teachers might tell offending students to return to their room at the end of the day, or the school might provide a common supervised detention room for all teachers to use.

Adams and Buchanan had schoolwide detention rooms. Only one of the vice principals could assign detention there. At Buchanan, if students failed to bring an excuse on the second day after an absence, they would be given detention by the vice-principal. At other schools, teachers could individually detain students (as at Adams and Buchanan also), but there was no central room for daily detention. These school differences were constant across the two years of the study.

Administrators at Adams and Buchanan differed in their opinions of the efficacy of detention. Adams administrators seemed confident in its deterrence of loitering in the halls, while some Buchanan administrators felt that chronic class cutters preferred detention to their regular classes.

One teacher at Buchanan used his own detention routine based on assertive discipline and claimed better results than the school's detention.

This sort of confidence in teacher-imposed detention was expressed by several teachers interviewed in the four schools lacking schoolwide detention.

In spite of such confidence, we found evidence that teacher-imposed detention was not a common practice at any school during either year. This evidence came from a questionnaire item regarding how regularly teachers kept a student after school or assigned other penalties for repeated unexcused absences. In Table III-1 "% yes" indicates the percentage of teachers at each school, each year, who checked either "as a regular procedure" or "on occasion," rather than "hardly ever" or "does not apply," in response to this item, item 17 on the questionnaire. Although not apparent from the table, it is interesting that aside from Adams, where approximately 30 percent of the teachers checked "as a regular procedure" each year, no more than 17 percent of the teachers at any school checked that response. We can see in the table that only at Adams did a majority of teachers report using detention even occasionally; furthermore, that majority declined from 61 percent in 1984 to 51 percent in 1985. In sharp contrast to Adams were Englewood and Fairweather, where only 19 to 24 percent of the teachers who responded used detention regularly or occasionally.

It is also evident that in 1984 greater percentages of teachers in the three District 1 schools overall than in District 2 schools overall reported using detention at least on occasion. We note that this pattern was broken in 1985 by the near-doubling of the 1984 percentage of Dearborn teachers at least occasionally using detention, from 20 percent to 38 percent. Although not evident in the table, this increase was accompanied by a decline in the percentage of Dearborn teachers checking "does not apply." We had been surprised in 1984 that about a third of the teachers at Dearborn and at the other two District 2 schools checked the "does not apply" response to this item, even though all teachers had the option to keep a student after

Table III-1
Teachers' Reports of Using Penalties for Skipping
(Percentage of teachers responding to questionnaire items and mean teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)*

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
17. I keep the student after school or assign penalties for repeated unexcused absences**	% "yes":	(84)	61	38	39	20	19	22
		(85)	51	37	34	38	24	20
	mean:	(84)	1.95	1.72	1.56	1.47	1.46	1.45
		(85)	1.94	1.57	1.48	1.66	1.40	1.46
18. I reduce the student's grade for repeated unexcused absences**	% reg.:	(84)	48	64	49	67	65	35
		(85)	33	60	36	63	58	24
	mean:	(84)	2.44	2.67	2.39	2.68	2.56	2.21
		(85)	2.10	2.58	2.18	2.55	2.52	1.93
Number of teachers in sample		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	58	64

* Key to Item Responses:
Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
1=hardly ever; 2=on occasion; 3=as a regular procedure
The designation % "yes" combines the percentage checking "on occasion" with the percentage checking "as a regular procedure."
The designation % reg. indicates the percentage checking "as a regular procedure."

** "Does not apply" response included in computation of percentages but not computation of means.

school. Apparently many rejected this option; they may have regarded punishment other than academic penalties (to be described below) as the administrators' job. At Englewood and Fairweather in 1985, the percentage of such teachers remained above 25 percent, while at Dearborn it declined to 16 percent.

Table III-1 also shows school means on this measure. "Does not apply" responses were excluded from the computation of means. These means will be used in conjunction with means on other measures to create a school index on enforcement of rules later in this section.

A special form of detention is Saturday School, in which the student is required to attend a half day on Saturday to complete school tasks. Saturday School was used by some of the schools in the study. Because it was used as an alternative to suspension, we will describe its implementation in more detail under that rubric.

Detention involved its own built-in escalation of penalties. Failure to appear or violation of detention rules generally brought more detention. A teacher who tried to keep a student after school unsuccessfully might refer the student to the office. In either case, the student was on the road to parental conferences and possible suspension. In the case of Saturday School (to be described), failure of a student to appear officially led to suspension automatically.

Because administrative involvement in more serious penalties also followed academic penalties, we postpone discussion of serious penalties until after the next section.

Academic Penalties

By academic penalties, we refer to loss of points, reduction of grade, and withdrawal from a course because of unexcused absences. The more serious the penalty, the more the involvement of others besides the teacher and student--i.e., the parent, counselor, and administrator.

Academic penalties include both "natural consequences" of absence, as when the student misses a test or does poorly on tests or assignments because of instruction missed, and artificial consequences applied by the teacher in direct response to the absence, such as loss of daily points. Artificial consequences were termed "mechanical" or "automatic" by some policy documents or interviewees.

District 1 policy prohibited teachers from "automatically" reducing a student's grade because of unexcused absences. The teacher was required to provide makeup work, however, only for excused absences. In the 1985 school year, the district added a policy "encouraging" teachers to provide makeup work in all cases. Although the district specified procedures for withdrawing students from courses, attempts by schools to make withdrawal automatic upon absence were also discouraged by the district.

District 2 had earlier, like District 1, prohibited teachers from reducing students' grades for absence, but the teachers' association had succeeded in revising this policy, which now allowed "natural consequences" for absence, including penalties for missing irretrievable classwork like labs or special activities. This created on paper a grayer area regarding teachers' use of grades to penalize absenteeism than District 1's black-and-white prohibition of such practice. District 2 also required teachers to provide students in each class at the outset with a written statement of attendance policies. According to administrators, the use of automatic penalties on the "micro" level, like giving points for attendance,

seemed to vary within each school.

Beyond day-to-day penalization of absence, teachers at all schools were required to send home academic progress reports at the middle of each term. Such reports put the parent on notice that absences were leading to serious consequences such as course failure. These reports also routinely went to counselors, who might call in the student. Either teacher or counselor could personally call the parents in serious cases. For example, at Englewood and Fairweather, teachers sent home progress reports after four "uncleared" absences. Teachers, according to the school regulations, might allow makeup for unexcused absences, although it was up to the student to request such makeup.

Procedures varied among schools for dropping a student from a class because of academic problems attributed to unexcused absences. In general, though, we sensed that administrators often discouraged this step. In 1984, Adams teachers had been allowed to drop a student from a course after 10 consecutive unexcused absences; this policy was reversed by the district in 1985. At Buchanan, teachers were encouraged to submit "student performance reports" in addition to academic progress reports if the teacher wanted someone else to take action. If there was no improvement, the teacher could, after 10 days, submit a form requesting that the student be dropped from the course. If this happened after midterm, the drop would be treated as an "F." Teachers were required to document prior steps, including parental notification, taken before a drop would be approved.

District 2 policy, unlike District 1 policy, provided for reduction in credit as an alternative to course withdrawal. This was most explicit at Dearborn in 1984. At that school, after a student had acquired five unexcused absences, the teacher had the student sign a reduction-in-credit form, which was then to be signed by the parent. This procedure was changed

from mandatory to discretionary in 1985, apparently in response to lack of teacher cooperation, teachers' frustration with the paperwork, and uneven implementation, all of which were uncovered in 1984 teacher interviews.

Englewood was less formal. After five unexcused absences with work not made up, teachers could give the student a "repeat" grade or an "incomplete" grade. With counselors' approval, teachers might also give partial credit or drop the student from the course. There were no "F" grades awarded during 1984; the "repeat" grade was not computed as part of the GPA. In the 1985 school year, the "F" grade was reinstated.

The Fairweather policy up until 1984 had made teachers the sole arbiters of dropping a student from a course, once the student had accumulated five unexcused absences. This policy was changed by the assistant principal in the 1984 spring quarter; after that time, teachers had to obtain administrative approval.

Teachers interviewed had widely differing stories to tell about use of academic penalties. Some simply let student absenteeism lead naturally to academic failure. Others had elaborate systems of points and penalties to provide immediate and predictable consequences for skipping and cutting. Although all teachers had the option of referring students to the office for skipping and cutting, many interviewees expressed more confidence in their own procedures. Some Coolidge teachers reported depriving students who cut class of that day's grade points. Fairweather teachers also claimed that personal confrontation of cutters was more effective than school-level action.

The teacher questionnaire asked about teachers' attitudes toward academic penalties. Nearly all respondents concurred that frequent absentees should be denied full credit or an "A" grade, the majority strongly agreeing with this statement. There were no marked differences among schools on this

item.

The teacher questionnaire also asked how regularly the teacher reduced a student's grade because of repeated unexcused absences; the response options were the same as with the item on detention discussed above: "hardly ever," "on occasion," and "as a regular procedure.". The second item posed a statement of philosophy--"No student who is frequently absent from class should be able to earn full credit or an 'A' grade"--and asked how strongly teachers agreed or disagreed. Table III-1 (displayed previously) shows the data on this item. Reducing a student's grade proved to be a far more common procedure than assigning detention, so the table shows the percentage of teachers at each school, each year, checking "as a regular procedure" (rather than at least "on occasion"). Table III-1 also shows percentages of teachers agreeing (or strongly agreeing) with the second item and school means on each of the two items.

In 1984, except at Adams, a higher percentage of teachers reported <u>regularly</u> reducing students' grades than even <u>occasionally</u> assigning detention for repeated unexcused absences. Clearly grade reduction was much more frequently resorted to than detention as a penalty. In that year, only at Fairweather did substantially less than half the respondents report using grade reduction as a regular procedure. The tabulated means show a general decline from 1984 to 1985 in reported grade reduction, however, with Adams and Coolidge joining Fairweather in having clearly lower means in 1985 than Buchanan, Dearborn, and Englewood. We had been somewhat surprised that in 1984 teachers in District 1, where reducing a grade automatically was prohibited, were hardly less likely to report reducing a grade than teachers in District 2, where teachers had more discretion on the matter. The declines at Adams and Coolidge in 1985 might be attributed to sensitization of teachers to that official policy, although that doesn't account for the

relatively high statistics at Buchanan in both years. We would summarize these results as pointing to stricter practice at Buchanan than the other two District 1 schools and more lenient practice at Fairweather than the other two District 2 schools.

Before venturing further, let us recapitulate the differences observed in the data on use of detention and academic penalties. We saw that, of the three District 1 schools, Adams exhibited the heaviest use of detention. In comparison, Buchanan exhibited the heaviest use of grade reduction of the three District 1 schools. Of the three District 2 schools, Dearborn in 1985 exhibited the heaviest use of detention; Dearborn and Englewood each exceeded Fairweather both years in use of grade reduction.

Intervening to Change Student Behavior

As described, the widespread use of grade reduction often led to a teacher's recommendation to the office to drop a student from a course. Because course withdrawal created scheduling and monitoring problems for administrators, and because it was perceived as a step in the direction of disenrollment from school, it often triggered action by administrators and counselors to change student behavior. This action might involve suspension from school. Prior to suspension, however, school personnel might initiate additional corrective or preventive measures seeking to increase student motivation to attend school. Administrators and counselors also might initiate such procedures as a consequence of their own monitoring of chronic absentees. In fact, teachers, counselors, and administrators often exhibited concurrent awareness of problem cases, with the result that sufficient intervention had been attempted prior to the teachers' recommendations for course withdrawal for such recommendations to be approved without question.

The strategies we will discuss include enlisting parental cooperation

and counseling individual students and parents. They also include identifying and intervening in academic problems intertwined with absenteeism. In addition, school personnel might identify personal and social problems contributing to absenteeism and refer cases to other agencies.

Corrective and preventive strategies sometimes involved school procedures that everyone was expected to implement, but they more often involved general policies that different school personnel might interpret in their own ways. Hence it is important to consider what each school did to develop a general climate of positive expectations through administrative leadership.

Parental Cooperation. We previously mentioned that several schools tried every day to notify all parents of students absent without an excuse. In part, this expedited the process of clearing absences; in part, it also alerted parents to student skipping and cutting. For the majority of cases where skipping and cutting were infrequent, notification in itself might be sufficient to enlist parental cooperation. Such cooperation might involve parental pressure on or punishment of students. That parents could provide leverage in many cases was attested to by students' questionnaire responses. As discussed in more detail in the companion paper (Duckworth and deJung 1986), "parents will find out" was the "biggest reason not to cut a class" for many students.

Contacting parents about chronic absenteeism was more difficult and frustrating. It required considerable judgment. Given the greater depth of contact required, there was time to contact only a small proportion of the parents involved. Adams teachers we interviewed in 1984 complained of a "huge" time lag between absences and notification of parents. One teacher claimed that "only extended absences are noticed" and that parents sometimes

weren't informed until several weeks had passed. "Absent students," said one Adams teacher, "are carried by the system." At Buchanan, counselors differentiated parents who responded to calls concerning absences, or even asked to be called, from parents who would or could do nothing. Likewise, at Fairweather, one administrator said that the school had a group of parents who indicated that they did not want to be called about their childrens' absences.

The schools differed in policies concerning teachers calling parents. At two schools, Buchanan and Fairweather, new policies in 1984 explicitly directed the teacher to call the home after repeated unexcused absences. Coolidge had no directive of this sort, but the teacher handbook did encourage teachers to contact parents by phone or progress report in such cases. The official policy at Dearborn was for the teacher to call home only if the student who repeatedly had been absent failed to return the "reduction in credit" form described above with a parental signature. Englewood policy was silent about teachers calling home. The Adams school policy handbook explicitly relieved teachers of any responsibility for calling home, although such practice was not "discouraged." In sum, we might expect teachers to call home most often at Buchanan and Fairweather and least often at Adams and Englewood.

Our teacher questionnaire asked how often teachers called the student's home in the case of repeated unexcused absences. The response options were the same as with detention and grade reduction. As with detention, the percentage of teachers in any school responding that they called home as a regular procedure was too low to make comparisons profitable. Evidently the Buchanan and Fairweather policies did not result in routine phone calls by teachers to parents. Hence we add the percentage of teachers who checked "as a regular procedure" and the percentage who

checked "on occasion." These total percentages, for each school each year, are shown in Table III-2, along with school means on this item. It is evident that in 1984 more teachers reported calling home at least "on occasion" in the three District 2 schools than in the three District 1 schools; for the extremes, compare 78 percent at Dearborn with 46 percent at Coolidge. The 1984 means exhibit the same pattern. In 1985, we observed a considerable decline in the percentages at all schools except Buchanan and Coolidge, with the result that percentages were roughly similar at all schools except Adams, which was only 26 percent in 1985. Inspection of the means reveals the same pattern, except that Buchanan emerged wih the highest mean (1.78) in 1985.

In sum, Buchanan's stability in frequency of teachers' calling home might indicate an effect of the new policy requiring that action, but Fairweather's decline in frequency during the same period, indicates no such effect of their similar new policy. It may be remembered from our discussion of the excusing process in Section II that each of these schools had begun a more aggressive effort by school office personnel to contact parents daily about absences. Buchanan used volunteers to call parents both years, whereas Fairweather was in the process of installing an automated dialing system in 1985. This latter innovation in particular may have given teachers the feeling that their efforts were less necessary than before. This interpretation is bolstered by the parallel evidence in a decline in teachers' calling home at Adams, which also was in the process of installing an automated dialing system in the months just prior to the 1985 questionnaire. These are only speculations but are worth further inquiry by administrators who may believe it is more effective for teachers to contact parents of chronic absentees even though the office is routinely notifying parents of both chronic and occasional absentees.

Table III-2
Teachers' Reports about Corrective Actions.
(Percentage of teachers respondng to questionnaire items and mean teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)*

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
15. I call the student's home for repeated unexcused absences**	% "yes":	(84)	57	60	46	78	75	76
		(85)	26	57	50	59	60	60
	mean:	(84)	1.86	1.76	1.60	2.06	1.91	2.00
		(85)	1.32	1.78	1.60	1.71	1.71	1.74
35. Parents help me in reducing absences in my classes	% agree:	(84)	30	28	51	41	46	68
		(85)	19	42	50	58	42	56
	mean:	(84)	2.08	2.13	2.31	2.41	2.30	2.72
		(85)	1.86	2.32	2.41	2.61	2.29	2.52
16. I inform the student's counselor for repeated unexcused absences**	% reg.:	(84)	40	55	66	37	50	62
		(85)	40	66	59	34	40	57
	mean:	(84)	2.38	2.53	2.69	2.18	2.36	2.56
		(85)	2.33	2.59	2.55	2.18	2.30	2.49
Number of teachers in sample		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	58	64

* Key to item responses:

The designation % "yes" combines the percentage checking "on occasion" with the percentage checking "as a regular procedure."
The designation % reg. indicates the percentage checking "as a regular procedure."
Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
15, 16: 1=hardly ever; 2=on occasion; 3=as a regular procedure
35: 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

** "Does not apply" response included in computation of percentages but not computation of means.

Were teachers likely to feel that calling the student's home paid off? The teachers we interviewed reported mixed results. At Adams in particular, teachers found working parents difficult to reach; when reached, they often seemed at a loss what to do. An undercurrent in teacher interviews was the desire for a schoolwide approach to building parental support.

The questionnaire asked whether teachers agreed or disagreed with the statement, "Parents help me in reducing absences in my classes." As the percentages agreeing in Table III-2 show, the schools differed. The lowest scores in 1984 were at Adams and Buchanan, where less than a third of the teachers agreed that parents helped. In 1985, Adams' score dropped even lower, but the percentage at Buchanan rose from 28 percent to 42 percent. The school where the largest percentage of teachers in 1984 agreed that parents helped was Fairweather, although that percentage dropped as sharply as Adams' in 1985, with Dearborn rising to the highest percentage in 1985. The rise at Dearborn and Buchanan in 1985 cannot be attributed to increased calling, because there was no such increase at those two schools. On the other hand, the drop at Adams did parallel a drop in frequency of calling home.

The drops at both Fairweather and Adams also accompanied the installation of automated calling equipment in the office of those two schools, which therefore cannot yet be said to have satisfied teachers' needs for schoolwide mobilization of parental support in reducing absences. (In fairness, neither system had been operating very long when the 1985 questionnaire was administered.) Conversely, the rises at Dearborn and Buchanan were accompanied by increased efforts by the office to use human resources to contact parents, so it may be that those efforts were paying off in perceived parental support regardless of frequency of teachers' calling.

Still, Englewood was also using human resources to contact parents in 1985, and Englewood showed no increase in teachers' perceptions of parental help.

In sum, there is no clear pattern in this data, although there are hints of effects worth exploring by administrators in those schools. Against the complexity of relationship between efforts to contact parents and perceived parental helpfulness must be placed the rather straightforward relationship between perceived helpfulness and the index of student-reported socioeconomic status developed in Table I-1. If one averages the means across the two years, one observes that perceived parental helpfulness increases as the status index increases. The one important exception is that Dearborn has a higher mean on helpfulness than its status index score would suggest. We may infer that the educational and economic characteristics of the parents influence teachers' perceptions of their helpfulness in reducing absences, and that differential efforts by administrators and teachers to contact parents have slight influence on this difference among schools.

Counseling. In addition to enlisting parental cooperation, school policies emphasized counseling of students, including three-way conferences with parents. All schools encouraged teachers to inform counselors early in the process of monitoring a serious absence problem and before or concurrently with imposing penalties. Counselors, on their part, were to monitor students' academic progress reports to note absence patterns related to academic problems and to contact students as needed. Counselors thus served as adjunct personnel in implementation of the penalties mentioned previously. They were expected to intervene intensively in serious cases. Counselors would meet with students, try to resolve differences with teachers, and call parents if necessary.

Such general policies were elaborated in the schools. At Adams, the attendance secretary was to inform a counselor when a letter about possible

disenrollment might be sent so that counselors could monitor subsequent attendance of such students. Likewise, at Dearborn, the attendance secretary was to notify a counselor if a pattern of student absences was observed. At Buchanan, the office's daily log of calls to parents was passed to counselors to identify cases where the legitimacy of excuses was in question. In the 1985 school year, Buchanan counselors took on the special role of monitoring freshman attendance. At Englewood each week counselors were responsible for reviewing attendance cards of that alphabetical section of the student body to which they were assigned. Where "patterns" appeared, the counselor was to call the parents and set up conferences where indicated. This process was expedited by the new computerized system in the 1985 school year, which gave counselors weekly printouts on their students. At Fairweather, counselors received daily computer printouts in addition to monitoring progress reports and receiving referrals for absenteeism. Counselors focused on absences that affected grades. They might require that the student carry a period sign-in slip with teacher feedback home to parents, although this practice was not widespread. In general, the strategy was for the counselor to take a positive role and leave enforcement to the vice-principal.

The teachers we interviewed in 1984 varied in their feelings about involving counselors. At Adams, some teachers felt that counselor intervention could help but that counselors were fully occupied with scheduling work and could do little real counseling. Coolidge teachers also saw counselors as overburdened by paper work. Buchanan teachers complained about the lack of feedback to them regarding corrective actions taken by counselors on referrals. They saw the school's special student performance report as more likely to produce a response from counselors than the more routine academic progress report used throughout the six schools.

The teacher questionnaire included an item about frequency of informing counselors regarding repeated unexcused absences, similar to the item discussed above about informing the student's home. Because notification of counselors (unlike notification of parents) was uniformly required by schools, we focus here on teachers' compliance with these procedures by informing counselors "as a regular procedure" rather than simply "on occasion." Item 16 on Table III-2 shows the percentage of teachers at each school, each year, responding that they informed the counselor as a regular procedure; also shown are school means on this item. As indicated in the comparison of school means between this item and the item on calling parents, teachers in each school reported informing counselors far more often than they reported contacting the home. As many as 66 percent of the teachers in a school reported regularly informing counselors. The school with the lowest percentages each year was Dearborn. This was surprising given the exceptionally clear ladder of reporting specified in the Dearborn staff handbook.

On their part, counselors, especially at Coolidge and Englewood, voiced despair over handling all the referrals and progress reports that came across their desk, which might total 200 each term. Some counselors felt that teachers had unrealistic expectations that counselors should interview the student and/or the parent in every case. One counselor at Coolidge typified counselor frustration by describing a "survival approach" of attending only to cases that had at least one other person caring. Counselors at Coolidge felt that teachers delayed too long in calling parents (which is consistent with teachers' own reports of irregular use of this practice in Table III-2).

In cases of chronic individual absenteeism, counselors often encountered personal problems or social conditions external to the school

that were contributing to absenteeism. These conditions included weak family structure, involvement with drugs or alcohol, or criminal activity. Each school was assigned a social worker to handle serious cases, but most agreed that the resources were slim for some of the schools. Hence counselors often felt helpless in dealing with the causes of absenteeism.

Identifying and Remedying Academic Problems. One consequence of counseling might be the identification of academic difficulties arising from either learning problems or external distractions. One approach to such problems might be changing the student's course placement or placing the student in a special program. Counselors might also attempt to enlist teacher cooperation in helping students overcome academic problems that were both cause and consequence of chronic absenteeism.

At two schools, it was possible to sequester problem students in a special academic program. Coolidge had an "Options" program for students whose truancy was associated with academic difficulties. Englewood also had a program for freshman and sophomores who "for various reasons have had attendance problems resulting in lowered academic achievement." A teacher-counselor at that school ran a "Core" program for two periods each day that combined several subjects plus counseling. Students were encouraged to return to the "regular program on a full time basis and graduate," although other options were given equal dignity, such as shifting to a high school equivalency program at a local community college. Such programs could deal with only a limited number of students, however, and some schools had no programs. Hence correction of academic problems usually had to take place in the student's regular academic program.

Many counselors and teachers we interviewed emphasized the importance of a teacher's actions in correcting patterns of absenteeism affecting academic performance. While some of these actions involved the imposition of

academic penalties as described previously, many teachers reported attempting to correct developing patterns of absenteeism without resorting to penalties. Confronting a student in the hall or when he or she returned to class was deemed effective, because it put the student on notice and demonstrated that someone cared that he or she attend class.

On the other hand, many teachers were ambivalent about trying to reform a chronic truant. The teacher questionnaire asked whether the school was better off if chronically-absent students simply dropped out or transferred. In an earlier study of eight New York high schools by Brodow (1979), majorities of teachers in eight urban high schools agreed with a similar item. In the present study, as shown in item 26 in Table III-3, from 43 percent (Fairweather) to 77 percent (Buchanan) of the teachers responding in 1984 agreed with this statement. Fairweather, Coolidge (50 percent), and Adams (55 percent) had the lowest percentages agreeing in 1984. In 1985, the percentages agreeing at these three schools increased, most sharply at Adams, which in 1985 had the highest percentage (76 percent) agreeing that the school was better off if such students dropped out. This suggests that several teachers at each of these schools lost interest in trying to reform chronically absent students during the two years of the study. Percentages agreeing at the other three schools fluctuated less, with the result that the sample as a whole seemed more in agreement with this item in 1985. The statement at first seems somewhat harsh; perhaps it seemed less harsh the second time respondents encountered it. The increasing despair at Adams about reforming truants was also indicated by the fact that 58 percent of Adams teachers agreed with an item (item 40) added to the 1985 questionnaire, the statement that the "seeds of truancy are sown before high school; we can't change things." Only 35 percent or less of the teachers at other schools agreed with this statement.

Table III-3
Teachers' Beliefs about Corrective Actions
(Percentage of teachers responding to questionnaire items and mean* of teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
26. The school is better off if chronically-absent students drop out	% agree:	(84)	55	77	50	67	68	43
		(85)	76	71	60	70	63	58
	mean:	(84)	2.72	3.06	2.56	2.88	2.90	2.53
		(85)	3.19	3.00	2.83	2.86	2.84	2.63
40. The seeds of truancy are sown before high school; we can't change things	% agree:	(85)	58	27	35	34	33	30
	mean:	(85)	2.60	2.12	2.18	2.23	2.35	2.19
37. School has a special responsibility for students who are failing.	% agree:	(84)	78	78	69	76	80	79
		(85)	71	69	71	76	73	81
	mean:	(84)	2.98	2.91	2.78	2.90	2.88	2.87
		(85)	2.71	2.83	2.98	2.87	2.78	2.93
20. I provide special help outside class time for students who are having difficulty**	% reg.:	(84)	80	32	23	43	55	45
		(85)	72	38	49	48	53	54
	mean:	(84)	2.82	2.26	2.13	2.34	2.53	2.43
		(85)	2.67	2.31	2.40	2.46	2.52	2.48
38. I adopt different goals for students who consistently do poorly on tests and assignments	% agree:	(84)	68	73	59	54	53	56
		(85)	49	67	67	40	56	55
	mean:	(84)	2.68	2.72	2.63	2.52	2.46	2.52
		(85)	2.35	2.79	2.72	2.38	2.56	2.57
36. I stick to the schedule rather than slowing instruction for students who are behind	% agree:	(84)	54	46	66	51	55	58
		(85)	41	36	54	70	54	52
	mean:	(84)	2.63	2.48	2.81	2.55	2.57	2.64
		(85)	2.42	2.19	2.75	2.81	2.61	2.59
Number of teachers in sample		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	48	64

* Means calculated using these values for item responses:
20: 1=hardly ever; 2=on occasion; 3=as a regular procedure
other items: 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

** "Does not apply" responses included in computation of percentages but not in computation of means

The issue of teacher responsiveness to students with academic problems (whether related to absenteeism or not) was brought up by many teachers and counselors interviewed. The issue was a provocative one, and we found substantial disagreement among the interviewees. Some argued for adjusting curricula to the needs and interests of the students, while others expressed doubts about whether universal secondary education was a good idea. The questionnaire asked whether school had a special responsibility to such students. Item 37 in Table III-3 shows the percentage of teachers at each school agreeing with this statement. There was widespread assent. Taking the two years together, from 69 percent to 81 percent of the teachers in any one school agreed that school had a special responsibility to students who are failing.

Given such widespread acceptance of responsibility, one might expect widespread use of practices to aid students with academic problems. The questionnaire asked about three such practices: providing special help outside class time; adopting different goals and grading criteria for students who consistently did poorly; and slowing instruction for students who are behind. Table III-3 shows the percentages of teachers providing special help as a regular procedure (item 20), percentages of teachers who agreed that they adopted different goals and grading criteria (item 38), and percentages of teachers who agreed with the statement, "I stick to the schedule rather than slowing instruction for students who are behind" (item 36).

Given Adams' teachers reported despair over reforming truants, we were surprised to find that Adams had by far the highest percentage of teachers responding that they provided special help outside class time as a regular procedure. Eighty percent of Adams teachers reported this practice in 1984, compared to about half the teachers at the three District 2 schools

and only 32 percent at Buchanan and 23 percent at Coolidge. This difference was maintained in 1985, even though the Adams percentage dropped to 72 percent while the percentage at most of the other schools rose. If accurate, these statistics combined with the increasing sense of futility at Adams described above raise the specter of looming teacher burn-out at that school.

Another suggestion of burn-out at Adams is given by the responses on adopting different learning goals. In 1984, the percentage of teachers at Adams reporting that they tried to accommodate low-achieving students in this way was 68 percent, second highest in the sample. In 1985, the percentage at Adams declined to 49 percent, which, combined with relative stability or even slight increases in the percentages at most other schools, placed Adams next to lowest in that year. Only Dearborn showed comparable decline from 1984 to 1985.

Could these declines be interpreted as increases in toughness rather than burnout? Some evidence concerning this possibility is found in the responses to the third practice queried, sticking to one's schedule versus slowing instruction for students who are behind (item 36). Adams teachers exhibited no increasing toughness from 1984 to 1985 on this item. The percentage agreeing declined from 54 to 41 percent. However, the percentage of teachers at Dearborn did increase from 1984 to 1985, when 70 percent agreed that they stuck to their schedules. Combined with the decline noted above in agreement that they adopted different learning goals, this increase suggests a stiffening in practice at Dearborn.

Comparative analyses should not obscure the overall finding that despite widespread acceptance of responsibility for helping students who are failing, seldom did substantially more than half the teachers in any school indicate whole-hearted efforts to convert this responsibility into practice. The anger toward chronic student absentees evidenced in percentages agreeing

that school would be better off without such students may be a factor here. In interviews, teachers often seemed to equate academic failings and absenteeism as evidence of inadequate socialization and/or willful laziness. In talking to administrators and counselors we found an awareness that a history of academic failure might be contributing to student avoidance of failure in current classes by cutting those classes, but we found little of this awareness in teachers. One must allow, however, that it is difficult to know what teachers would do with such awareness. The practices queried in the questionnaire, while perhaps feasible in elementary school classes, would clearly place a considerable burden on high school teachers. Hence it is not surprising that there is pessimism about intervention in chronic absenteeism.

Administrative Procedures and Strategies Prior to Disenrollment

The various interventions described above took place against a backdrop of threatened suspension, cumulative course withdrawal, and ultimate disenrollment from school. State law allowed schools to suspend students from school for up to five school days. State law also stipulated that students who had 10 consecutive absences without an excuse would be disenrolled. How administrators exercised these responsibilities for imposing penalties in cases of chronic absenteeism varied from school to school.

Adams. Adams teachers were encouraged to notify a vice-principal in cases of repeated truancy. Official referrals were not required in the 1984 school year, but the new vice-principal in charge in the 1985 school year "encouraged" teachers to submit them. Adams teachers interviewed indicated reluctance to use referrals; they feared burying the school in paperwork. They also felt that administrators "had to hit too hard." At that school, the official policy called for the attendance secretary to flag cases of 10

had missed second-period registration. When such cases had been detected, the vice-principal's secretary was to send out a form letter warning parents that the student might be disenrolled. The school had experimented during the year preceding the study with a policy of disenrolling a student from school for 10 days' unexcused absence in any one course. This had been countermanded by the district in response to community objections. The school then dropped the student in question from only the course(s) affected, although the rest of the student's day was rescheduled to eliminate any open periods. In 1985, the district also countermanded automatic withdrawal from a course because of absences.

Buchanan. At Buchanan High School, the new principal in the 1984 school year circulated guidelines in February of that year for handling chronic absences: if the student stayed out five days, the vice-principal would institute procedures like sign-in sheets or contracts. After eight days' absence, a parental conference was required if the student was to stay enrolled. It was at this point that the summaries of period-by-period absence available to the administrator through the computer were used. The student would be dropped from a course after being absent 10 days, and this had happened often enough that there were a number of students "loose" each period; such students were usually to be found in the library or learning resource centers. In 1985, the vice-principals stated that these guidelines had been allowed to lapse after a few months because it was impossible to stay on top of the paperwork generated by the number of cases. The vice principals at Buchanan expressed reluctance to use suspension, because they saw it as a reward for, rather than a deterrent to, chronic absenteeism.

Coolidge. In the 1984 school year and the first half of the 1985 school year, Coolidge operated Saturday School, ostensibly as an alternative to suspension for serious cases of chronic truancy. The vice-principal,

however, admitted that suspension was rarely imposed on students who skipped Saturday School. It was discontinued in March, 1985, after the second round of questionnaires, because the school could no longer afford to pay the building custodian. (Buchanan had likewise discontinued a Saturday School some years earlier.)

Dearborn. At Dearborn, the counselor assigned to each grade screened cases requiring more serious penalties. During the 1984 school year, each of the four Dearborn administrators was responsible for attendance in one grade. The principal or vice-principal working with a particular grade was involved in disputes with parents of students liable for disenrollment because of absence. Administrators therefore had a major role in shaping the practice of counselors and the participation of parents in reducing absenteeism. This sharing of administrative responsibility for attendance was unique at Dearborn among the schools in this study. Administrators took a flexible approach to such cases. The principal articulated an individualistic approach to a student's problems. He felt that the school staff could be counted on to support constructive efforts to solve students' problems. He regarded office action as a "backup system" to be brought to bear after the student had gotten into trouble by not responding to teacher pressure. The principal listed a series of escalating consequences: an initial "kick in the butt;" then "little red books" for the student to have signed each period; behavioral improvement contracts which specified conditions for subsequent suspension; and finally actual suspension. The emphasis was clearly on finding the most productive response to a case rather than applying rules automatically.

In the 1985 school year, the new vice-principal at Dearborn, who had exclusive responsibility for attendance, reported having invested most of her energy in the abortive attempt to get a school-based computerized attendance

system running. By her account, the new principal and vice-principal saw themselves as restoring order to what had become a drifting situation under the previous administration. The actual interventions described, however, were quite similar to those described by the preceding administration.

Englewood. At Englewood, as at Dearborn, the assistant principal was to be involved only in those cases where the counselor was unable to obtain cooperation or wanted assistance or where the student was liable to be dropped from a course or disenrolled from school. He indicated a reluctance to impose penalties on students who had accumulated absences. There was a policy to avoid suspension of students for absenteeism. Rather than "penalties" he preferred "consequences" such as referral to the opportunity center (an alternative high school) or to the social worker assigned to the intermediate district or release from school. Officially, the student was to be disenrolled after 10 days, but the vice-principal hesitated before taking such action and tried to sustain a student's connection with Englewood while corrective actions were proceeding. He felt, like the Dearborn principal, that different cases of student absenteeism called for different strategies and responses. In the 1985 school year, this assistant principal responded to early findings of our project by developing a list of students to be more closely monitored by counselors and by forming a committee of teachers to develop new policy recommendations.

Fairweather. The assistant principal at Fairweather, new in 1984, had announced a firm policy of suspending students who skipped classes. She had students liable for this penalty sign behavior improvement contracts containing this provision. She saw herself moving to reverse widespread perceptions in the school that absenteeism was not a concern. Several persons mentioned that the school had in earlier years taken a "laissez-faire" attitude towards absenteeism and had endorsed students'

making personal decisions about attending or not attending courses on a particular day in light of the demands of academic work. The school was considered to view itself as a "junior college" preparing people for four-year colleges and to grant students corresponding autonomy. The addition of the ninth grade, which enlarged the Fairweather student body in 1984 to over 1,500 students, had made this situation unmanageable.

Saturday School was initiated by Fairweather at the beginning of the 1985 school year. The vice-principal for attendance, now in the second year of her tenure, proceeded to tighten the use of suspension for cutting, and particularly suspension for students who failed to show up for Saturday School. This procedure was evaluated by the school and judged to be a success in reducing absences. She reported that teachers stopped her in the hall to thank her for her efforts to control absenteeism.

General Perceptions and Satisfaction

We have described the orchestration of school response to unexcused absences and tried to focus on comparison across schools and years with regard to specific responses. This analytic approach, while valid for investigating the options schools have in dealing with skipping and cutting, can misrepresent the reality of such responses, however. In fact, flexibility and reflexivity characterized that reality. It is important to step back and look at overall impressions of policy implementation, especially as we raise the question of staff satisfaction.

What was the overall climate regarding the procedures described above? How did different actors perceive one another's actions? How satisfied were people with school management of absenteeism in general? We now look at evidence in the interview material and questionnaire responses to answer these questions.

The issue of strictness or consistency of rule enforcement was a major theme in interviews, cutting across all procedures. Administrators complained that many teachers either failed to enforce rules or did so inconsistently, creating problems for administrators when cases were appealed by students or parents. However, administrators themselves varied in articulation of district rules. For example, a new District 1 rule limiting athletic participation for students who had cut classes (which took effect after the 1985 questionnaire) was interpreted to us in different ways by administrators in the schools we studied. Teachers complained about their colleagues' inconsistencies as well and occasionally admitted to lax enforcement themselves, pleading overwork or a sense of futility. Teachers mostly complained about the laxness of administrators, however. Hence the issue of policy implementation, already raised in connection with specific penalties like detention and loss of credit, needs to be looked at globally.

Table III-4 shows responses of teachers to a variety of questionnaire items regarding rule enforcement. Although not apparent in the table, virtually all teachers returning the questionnaire at each school agreed that they "strictly enforced" rules on attendance in their classes. The table shows the percentage of those who "strongly agreed" with this statement. As with previous findings regarding accuracy of recording attendance, the schools in each district each year with the highest proportion of teachers strongly agreeing with this statement were Buchanan and, especially, Dearborn. There were no significant changes from 1984 to 1985, although means at each school remained stable or rose slightly in the second year.

As shown in Table III-4, in 1984 a majority of teachers in each school also agreed that "if all teachers would regularly enforce attendance rules, we would quickly see a reduction in absences." This sentiment was strongest at Coolidge in District 1 and at Englewood in District 2, joined by

Table III-4
Teachers' Beliefs about Rule Enforcement
(Percentage of teachers responding to questionnaire items and mean* of teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
22. I strictly enforce the rules on attendance in my classes	% str.agree:	(84)	38	57	44	61	43	31
		(85)	47	55	50	64	47	30
	mean:	(84)	3.30	3.51	3.35	3.55	3.33	3.21
		(85)	3.45	3.52	3.43	3.60	3.43	3.23
25. If all teachers would enforce attendance rules, the number of absences would decline	% agree:	(84)	63	74	80	68	77	67
		(85)	55	62	67	70	71	62
	mean:	(84)	2.83	3.08	3.20	2.86	3.12	2.94
		(85)	2.67	2.81	2.88	2.98	3.00	2.75
11. In enforcing penalties for unexcused absences, administrators at this school are	% strict:	(84)	5	13	4	9	7	7
		(85)	9	14	10	35	5	28
	% lenient:	(84)	50	38	58	46	43	53
		(85)	47	30	49	24	47	29
	mean:	(84)	1.87	2.24	1.69	2.02	1.76	1.73
		(85)	1.98	2.35	1.79	2.68	1.54	2.58
Index of teacher-reported enforcement (Avg. of 17+18+22+11)		(84)	2.39	2.54	2.25	2.43	2.28	2.15
		(85)	2.45	2.53	2.27	2.66	2.23	2.37
31. Students can get around penalties for cutting	% agree:	(84)	76	89	79	90	70	80
		(85)	81	83	88	78	72	84
	mean:	(84)	2.93	3.33	3.13	3.10	2.97	2.92
		(85)	3.05	3.10	3.21	2.98	2.95	3.11
24. To reduce cutting, we need stronger penalties	% str.agree:	(84)	54	64	55	61	55	53
		(85)	70	56	53	63	52	44
	mean:	(84)	3.37	3.45	3.36	3.53	3.32	3.28
		(85)	3.58	3.37	3.36	3.47	3.36	3.19
14. Most payoff for reducing absences	% grade reduction:	(85)	46	48	40	21	49	62
	% time penalty:	(85)	39	31	38	54	30	15

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
11: 1=generally lenient; 2=neither strict nor lenient;
3=strict in some cases, lenient in others; 4=generally strict
All other items: 1=str. disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=str. agree

Dearborn in 1985, but differences were small. This response's implicit criticism of other teachers is interesting in light of the discrepancy between teachers' nearly universal characterization of themselves as "strict" and the uneven use of penalties like grade reduction and detention described earlier. Teachers may think that their own rule enforcement is stricter than it actually is. Means on this item declined in 1985 except at Dearborn. This decline may be evidence of increasing resignation, similar to the increase in percentages agreeing that school was better off without chronic truants. It cannot be interpreted as evidence of increasing satisfaction with rule enforcement by teachers, because the school with the most notable increase in use of penalties--Dearborn--was the one school to increase on belief that more widespread enforcement was needed.

We were especially interested in perceptions of administrative enforcement. In 1984, our administrator questionnaire asked how they would describe rule enforcement by other administrators in their school. Out of 18 respondents, nine said "generally strict" and an additional seven said "strict in some cases, lenient in others." Thus nearly all saw their administrative colleagues as strict at least some of the time.

The teacher questionnaire included a similar item about administrative enforcement. Teachers definitely did not see administrators as strict. Given the same four labels to apply to administrative enforcement of penalties for unexcused absences, teachers in 1984 most often picked the label "generally lenient." As shown in item 11 in Table III-4, percentages selecting this response varied from a low of 38 percent at Dearborn to a high of 58 percent at Coolidge. Less than 1 in 10 teachers in 1984 characterized administrators as "generally strict." However, although not presented in Table III-4, in 1984 substantial percentages of teachers at Adams (26 percent), Buchanan (42 percent), and Dearborn (30 percent) characterized

their administrators as "strict in some cases, lenient in others." Only at Buchanan, however, did a majority of teachers in 1984 describe their administrators as strict at least some of the time.

This situation changed in 1985. There were increases in the percentages of teachers at Dearborn (from 9 percent to 35 percent) and Fairweather (from 7 percent to 28 percent) describing their administrators as generally strict in 1985. There were also corresponding decreases in the percentages at those two schools describing administrators as generally lenient.

We now combine a number of measures of strict enforcement into a single index that sums up teachers' reports about the general level of rule enforcement. This index will be useful in analyses later in this section and in Section IV on influences on student responses to school rules. The index of teacher-reported enforcement was computed as the average of the school means on four items. Two were the items on frequencies of assigning detention and reducing grades for repeated unexcused absences, means of which were reported in Table III-1. The other two measures, reported in Table III-4, were teachers' agreement with a statement about how strict they were and teachers' characterizations of administrators in terms of strictness and leniency. School scores on this index are shown in Table III-4.

Buchanan obtained the highest score in 1984 and the second highest score in 1985, when it was supplanted in first place by the 1984 runner-up, Dearborn, largely because of the increased perception of administrators as strict at Dearborn in 1985. Adams had the third highest score each year. Among the remaining three schools, the main point of interest was the sharp rise in Fairweather's score from 1984, when it was lowest, to 1985, when it was fourth. In comparison to Fairweather, Coolidge and Englewood remained relatively stable across the two years.

The concern about lax rule enforcement, implied by teacher characterization of administrators as lenient and the implication that other teachers could do more to reduce absences, is borne out in the high percentages of teachers at each school agreeing that "students can get around penalties for class cutting and tardiness," as shown in Table III-4. Differences among schools on this item were slight. It may be worth noting that Buchanan and Dearborn, whose teachers emerged on some items as stricter than teachers at other schools in their districts, on this item, had the highest statistics in their districts in 1984 but showed decreases from 1984 to 1985.

There were clear recommendations for stronger penalties. Nearly all teachers in each school agreed--and a majority strongly agreed everywhere except at Fairweather in 1985--that "to reduce class cutting, we need stronger penalties." Two-thirds of the 18 administrators responding to the 1984 questionnaire also agreed with this item. What sorts of penalties were advocated? In 1985, we added an item to the questionnaire asking the most productive strategy for reducing absenteeism; choices included automatic grade reduction, makeup time penalty (detention or Saturday School), dropping distinction between excused and unexcused absences, rapid return of absence summaries to teachers, and "none of the above." As shown in Table III-4, grade reduction received the largest percentage of responses except at Dearborn, where teachers preferred a makeup time penalty, the second choice at other schools.

In the comments on the second year questionnaire, there were few widespread recommendations in the area of academic penalties. Teachers felt restricted in their use of penalties in some schools. Interviews with administrators in the second year gave little evidence of efforts to increase consistency in teacher application of penalties, despite teacher awareness of

their own inconsistency on this count. Administrators perhaps felt unable to to regulate teachers' use of grading practices.

One administrative effort to increase consistency in teacher application of penalties was reported. In 1984, the Coolidge vice-principal for curriculum--not the vice-principal for attendance--reported that she had that spring analyzed grades in connection with numbers of absences and had discovered several cases where students had received high grades despite numerous absences. She felt that some teachers were being too lenient in their grading. She acknowledged that this subject was potentially controversial and reported laying the problem before the faculty rather than proposing changes in their grading practices. We do not know what effect this had. An administrator at Fairweather reported that before the study, an earlier attempt along similar lines had been shelved in response to faculty objections.

We come finally to staff satisfaction with school management of student absenteeism. As shown in item 21 in Table III-5, teacher satisfaction with support from administrators and counselors on class absences in 1984 was low; at four schools less than half the teachers were satisfied. The school variation was from 35 percent satisfied at Adams to 53 percent satisfied at Englewood and Fairweather. The differences here paralleled differences noted earlier in Table III-2 in the regularity with which teachers informed counselors about repeated unexcused absences; the percentage of teachers regularly informing counselors was positively associated with the percentage reporting satisfaction with support. There was a substantial rise in 1985 in the percentage of teachers agreeing that they were satisfied with support, except at Coolidge and Englewood. We find the near doubling of the percentage satisfied at Dearborn from 45 percent to 84 percent especially impressive, given reported efforts there to tighten up

Table III-5
Teachers' Satisfaction with School Management of Absenteeism
(Percentage of teachers responding to questionnaire items and mean* of teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
21. I am satisfied with support from administrators and counselors on absences	% agree:	(84)	35	40	49	45	53	53
		(85)	60	55	48	84	55	71
	mean:	(84)	2.15	2.30	2.45	2.41	2.47	2.69
		(85)	2.58	2.62	2.47	3.12	2.47	2.76
34. Administrators have provided effective leadership in dealing with absences	% agree:	(84)	29	44	44	42	40	53
		(85)	55	60	53	85	30	69
	mean:	(84)	2.17	2.36	2.33	2.28	2.26	2.45
		(85)	2.48	2.55	2.47	3.02	2.16	2.66
Index of teacher-reported satisfaction (Avg. of 21+34)		(84)	2.14	2.33	2.39	2.34	2.36	2.57
		(85)	2.53	2.58	2.47	3.07	2.32	2.71
Number of teachers returning questionnaire		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	58	64

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

procedures. Nearly as impressive was the increase from 35 percent to 60 percent satisfied at Adams, especially in light of all the evidence we have reviewed of Adams' pessimism. Evidently th new administrators at Adams were appreciated. The increase at Fairweather from 53 percent to 71 percent may also be attributed to the assistant principal's efforts there.

Over and above the issue of support is the issue of leadership. Both personal-social and academic problems of students were often attributed to school climate and particularly to the quality or relevance of the curriculum and to teacher skills and expectations. Many of the people interviewed saw problems in curriculum or in the practice of particular teachers. Boredom with classes was listed as a major reason for cutting by many students. What evidence was there that administrators were taking positive steps to improve school climate?

Some administrators, especially those with the largest tenure in the job of managing absenteeism, expressed resignation in the face of the inevitability of absenteeism. For example, at Coolidge, the vice-principal for attendance said that administrative follow-through on absenteeism had been and would always be ineffective, because the volume of cases was overwhelming. He felt that calling parents was often a waste of time. These sentiments were echoed by other administrators. The theme of inevitability was given a positive coloration by the Dearborn principal in 1984, who attributed absenteeism to adolescents' "growing pains." He was reluctant to try to impose a tight rein on skipping and cutting; he felt that students matured if they were allowed opportunities for minor rebellion and subsequently learned the natural (academic) consequences of such rebellion.

There were special efforts to handle absenteeism being made at some schools, however, especially where there had recently been turnover in administrative personnel. For example, Adams' and Buchanan's new principals

had initiated dropout prevention programs. Dearborn's new administrators had centralized the management of absenteeism and moved explicitly to crack down on unexcused absences. The new assistant principal at Fairweather had challenged a schoolwide climate of tolerance of class cutting. Furthermore, increasing attention in the national media to high school quality had provided a basis for many administrators to announce new efforts to improve academic programs. We expected, therefore, that there might be an increase in perceived leadership over the two years.

The questionnaire asked teachers whether they thought that administrators had provided effective leadership in dealing with absences. As the figures in item 34 of Table III-5 show, teachers in 1984 were unimpressed with administrative leadership. At four of the schools, the percentage agreeing ranged between 40 percent and 44 percent. Adams and Fairweather stood out as differing slightly from the other four schools. Only 29 percent of Adams teachers reported effective administrative leadership, whereas 53 percent of Fairweather teachers reported effective leadership at their school. Hence the 1984 data confirm the malaise at Adams that year and also the new efforts at Fairweather.

In 1985, the percentage of teachers at each school agreeing that administrators had provided effective leadership rose substantially except at Coolidge and Englewood (where it actually fell). As with the item on support, the most dramatic increase was at Dearborn, where 85 percent agreed in 1985. Hence we did find a general effect as well as specific evidence of efforts at Dearborn.

As with the index of teacher-reported enforcement, we take the average of the means on the measures of support and leadership as an index of teacher-reported satisfaction. School scores on this index are shown in Table III-5. In 1984, Fairweather had the highest score and Adams the

lowest. In 1985, while Fairweather's score rose to 2.71, it was surpassed by Dearborn's rise to 3.07. Furthermore, Adams' score rose in 1985 above Coolidge's and Englewood's, which became the lowest score in 1985.

Comparing scores on the satisfaction index with the enforcement index in Table III-4, we observe that in 1984 they were nearly inverse in relationship. The three highest enforcement scores were at Buchanan, Dearborn, and Adams--schools with the three lowest satisfaction scores. In 1985, this situation reversed itself. The four schools with highest enforcement scores were Dearborn, Buchanan, Adams, and Fairweather--the four schools with the highest satisfaction scores.

How can one account for this change? One might see a sequence of low satisfaction leading to stricter enforcement, paying off in increased satisfaction. In this scenario, the 1984 pattern in satisfaction reflected teacher demoralization associated with community conditions. Note that Adams and Buchanan are lower on satisfaction and status than Coolidge, and Dearborn is lower on both indices than Englewood and Fairweather. We would explain the switch in terms of administrative efforts begun in 1984 or 1985, often triggered by dissatisfaction, that paid off in satisfaction in 1985. The payoff was greatest at Dearborn.

We have thus far described the management of student absenteeism in terms of administrators' and counselors' reports of school policy and practice and in terms of teachers' reports of their own implementation of and satisfaction with school procedures. In Section IV, we turn to evidence from student interviews and questionnaires, along with further evidence provided by teachers, regarding student perceptions of school rule enforcement and student compliance with attendance rules.

IV. Students' Responses to Attendance Rules and Procedures

The description and comparison of high school procedures for managing student absenteeism would not be complete without an investigation of rates of student absenteeism and an attempt to interpret differences in such rates in light of the evidence that has been presented in Sections II and III regarding differences in management procedures. We undertake these tasks now. First, we introduce evidence of how students perceive the management procedures we have discussed. Second, we consider whether some schools have more students who reject the school's right to impose penalties and are unresponsive to school efforts to manage absenteeism. Third, we examine several kinds of evidence about rates of student absenteeism. Finally, we compare school scores on indices of absenteeism with school scores on indices of status, rule enforcement, and staff satisfaction. Based on such comparisons, we attempt to assess the effectiveness of different school procedures.

Students' Perceptions of Rule Enforcement

Interviews in 1984 with students at each of the schools suggested the following points. Nearly all students we interviewed saw significant variation among teachers in how strictly they monitor attendance. Students generally saw teachers as lacking knowledge about full-day skipping as opposed to cutting of their classes. Many students said it was easy to fake an excuse or to get a parent to write an excuse. This was especially pronounced among interviewees at Englewood and Fairweather. Students generally emphasized the threat of grade reduction in talking about consequences of skipping. Students at Dearborn were specific about the reduction-in-credit program in 1984.

Students we interviewed were divided in their endorsements of stricter use of penalties and more fundamental improvements in instruction as means to reduce skipping. Some placed the blame for absenteeism squarely on students and parents who valued education too little; they felt that the schools needed to crack down. Others (perhaps the majority of the interviewees, who were generally among the better students) blamed poor teaching. Poor teaching took a variety of forms: inept management of time; lack of preparation; giving students little to do; and general lack of caring about the subject and/or the student's learning. At Dearborn in particular, several students emphasized that cutting was a rational response to a boring teacher. At Englewood and especially at Fairweather, there was more talk about a sort of "calculus" of class attendance in which the costs and benefits of reallocating time among subjects were reassessed each day. In general, students suggested that the more academically demanding the course, the more likely students were to attend regularly and to use other school time doing homework or studying for that course. Some students, however, recognized that this formula might not apply to students who are behind academically who might consider academically demanding courses to be punishing situations.

The student questionnaire provided additional data on students' perceptions of policy enforcement and on related school efforts to reduce absenteeism. One statement on the questionnaire was, "I am well-informed about the penalties for skipping, cutting, and tardiness." Given the formal requirement in District 2 for teachers to present written policies to students at the beginning of each course--attested by several of the student interviewees--we wondered whether students at the three District 2 schools would be more likely to agree with this statement than students at the three District 1 schools. In fact, the great majority of students in each school

agreed with this statement. The lowest percentage agreeing was at Coolidge (78 percent) and the highest percentage agreeing was at Dearborn (93 percent). However, Adams and Buchanan students were approximately as likely to agree as students at Englewood and Fairweather. Hence it cannot be said that the District 2 policy had any notable general effect. This item was dropped from the questionnaire in 1985.

Two other statements on the student questionnaire asserted that school rules on skipping whole days (item 16) and cutting a class (item 17) were strictly enforced. Percentages of students at each school, each year, agreeing with these statements are shown in Table IV-1, along with school means on each item. In 1984, between 40 and 56 percent of students in each school agreed with these statements. This means that about half the students in each school felt that such policies were <u>not</u> strictly enforced in 1984. This accords with the low percentages of teachers at each school characterizing administrators as "generally strict" in enforcing rules. It hardly accords, however, with teachers' near-universal characterization of <u>themselves</u> as "strict" in enforcing attendance rules. It is noteworthy that in the three District 1 schools, the school with the highest percentage of students agreeing in 1984 that rules were strictly enforced--Buchanan--was the school which also had the highest percentage of teachers in the three District 1 schools agreeing that they were strict. However, in District 2, the same pattern did not hold: Dearborn students, unlike Dearborn teachers, were not more likely to report strictness than respondents in other District 2 schools. Perhaps the greater administrative flexibility in Dearborn, compared to Buchanan, accounted for this difference. In contrast, Fairweather students were relatively more likely than their teachers to report strictness in enforcement of rules on cutting.

At most schools there was little change in 1985 in the percentage of

Table IV-1
Students' Reports of Rule Enforcement
(Percentage of students selecting questionnaire items and mean* of student responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
16. School rules about skipping whole days are strictly enforced	% agree:	(84)	40	51	43	47	50	51
		(85)	43	51	42	49	52	64
	mean:	(84)	2.32	2.51	2.33	2.46	2.48	2.50
		(85)	2.34	2.50	2.33	2.48	2.52	2.74
17. School rules about cutting a class are strictly enforced	% agree:	(84)	48	56	47	48	42	54
		(85)	53	59	45	45	43	66
	mean:	(84)	2.43	2.60	2.40	2.47	2.31	2.55
		(85)	2.53	2.63	2.38	2.41	2.37	2.77
Student-reported enforcement (Avg. of 16+17)		(84)	2.38	2.56	2.36	2.46	2.40	2.52
		(85)	2.44	2.56	2.36	2.44	2.44	2.76
15. Students not marked so when absent	% agree:	(85)	33	36	33	31	29	32
	mean:	(85)	2.15	2.21	2.17	2.16	2.11	2.20
4. Absent less from classes where noticed	% agree:	(85)	36	36	43	45	46	39
	mean:	(85)	2.24	2.18	2.38	2.37	2.39	2.27
26. Won't graduate if I'm absent a lot	% agree:	(85)	58	56	48	52	47	43
	mean:	(85)	2.65	2.62	2.48	2.53	2.43	2.35
3. Absence hardly affects most grades	% agree:	(85)	62	51	64	56	63	66
	mean:	(85)	2.74	2.50	2.78	2.57	2.69	2.81
31. Days can miss in strictest class	% > 4:	(85)	55	56	56	46	57	59
	mean:	(85)	1.96	2.01	2.00	1.76	1.88	2.01
32. Days can miss in least strict class	% > 4:	(85)	83	82	84	78	87	88
	mean:	(85)	2.80	2.82	2.95	2.69	2.77	2.95
Number of students responding		(84)	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
		(85)	755	792	967	916	906	1246

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
31, 32: 1=4 days; 2=6 days; 3=10 days; 4=15 days;
5=missing makes no difference
other items: 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

students agreeing that rules were strictly enforced. At Adams, there was an increase of only 3 to 5 percentage points in agreement with each item, despite the new vice-principal's efforts. Adams' percentages remained below Buchanan's percentages in 1985. More noteworthy, the percentage of students at Fairweather agreeing with each of the two items jumped by 12 to 13 percentage points in 1985. Nearly two-thirds of the students agreed that rules were strictly enforced in 1985. Here is clear evidence that the increased use of suspension, coupled in 1985 with Saturday School, had an impact on student perceptions.

Given the similarity in patterns of response to these two items on strictness, and in order to simplify analyses at the end of this section, we averaged school means on these two items to produce an index of student-reported rule enforcement. The school scores each year on this index are shown in Table IV-1. We observe that in 1984, Buchanan scored highest on this index, followed closely by Fairweather. In 1985, Fairweather's score increased and clearly surpassed Buchanan's. Of the other four schools, Dearborn was somewhat higher than the remaining three in 1984, but Adams' and Englewood's scores rose to close the gap in 1985, leaving Coolidge clearly at the bottom that year.

Too much can be made of these differences, however. Aside from the noticeable jump in Fairweather's score in 1985, the schools were remarkably similar. Buchanan holds roughly the position here that it did with the index of teacher-reported enforcement, but Dearborn students seemingly fail to register the increase in 1985 at that school in teacher-reported enforcement. Furthermore, Fairweather students see their school as stricter or becoming stricter to a greater extent than do Fairweather teachers. Perhaps this student view reflects administrative efforts.

In 1985, we added several items to the student questionnaire

regarding rule enforcement and the perceived consequences for skipping. Percentages of students checking specified responses to these items and school means on responses are also shown in Table IV-1. In response to item 15, "A lot of students are not marked absent when they are not in class," about a third of the students at each school agreed. In response to a statement that "I am absent less from classes where attendance is carefully checked than from classes where it is easier not to be noticed as absent," from 36 percent to 46 percent agreed. While these findings suggest that a third or more of the students at each school spot opportunities to cut without being noticed, these items do not differentiate among schools to any appreciable extent.

Other new items in 1985 asked whether students were aware of specifically academic consequences of skipping. One statement was, "If I'm absent a lot from some of my classes, I probably won't graduate." As item 26 in Table IV-1 shows, the percentages of students agreeing with the item varied from a low of 43 percent at Fairweather to a high of 58 percent at Adams. This means that on average half the students at each school felt they could be absent a lot and still graduate. While relatively small, the differences follow the pattern of the index of student-reported socioeconomic status. The higher the status, the lower the percentage of students who feel that their chances of graduating are affected by absence.

A more specific, if negative, indicator of awareness of academic consequences of skipping was the percentage of students agreeing with item 3, "In most of my classes being absent two or three times a month hardly affects my grade." From half (Buchanan) to two-thirds (Fairweather) of the students agreed. Thus even more students see their grade unaffected by occasional absence than see their graduation unaffected by frequent absences.

The final new items on consequences were questions on how many days

students could miss in their strictest class and in their least strict class and still get a passing grade. The lowest possible estimate was four days; the highest was "being in class or not makes no difference." As Table IV-1 shows, with the exception of Dearborn, the percentages responding more than four days in their strictest class (item 31) ranged from 46 to 59 percent, and the percentages responding more than four days in their least strict class (item 32) ranged from 78 to 88 percent. Furthermore about 10 percent of students in each school except Englewood (5 percent) responded that, in their least strict class, "being in class or not doesn't make a difference" in terms of the grade. Dearborn stood out because student responses there averaged lower on both items--a mean of 1.76 for the strictest class and 2.69 for the least strict class. In other words, Dearborn students were more aware of academic consequences on these measures. This seems to bear out the impact of the reduction-in-credit program, even though it was given reduced emphasis by the administration in 1985.

Student Attitudes Towards School Penalties

In addition to student perceptions about rule enforcement, we were also interested in whether students accepted school penalties and whether students thought penalties would be effective. Objections to penalties were most noticeable among the interviewees at Englewood and Fairweather, where the open campus and free-period schedule seemed to have established higher expectations of student autonomy. Several students indicated that the student body would not stand for a regimented system. They also thought that such a system would destroy student responsibility and would provoke student rebellion.

The questionnaire included two items to measure student rejection of penalties. Percentages of students agreeing with these items, and school

means, are shown in Table IV-2. One item, item 21, rejected any penalties. The percentage of students in each school agreeing with this fairly drastic assertion ranged from 29 to 40 percent, with Fairweather most in agreement and Buchanan least in agreement. The second item, item 19, protested the influence of attendance on grades. This was a more reasonable objection because district policy provided some basis for dissociating attendance and grading. Slightly higher percentages of students agreed with this--from 38 to 52 percent in 1984. Again, Fairweather students were most in agreement, although, unlike on item 21, on this item, Englewood produced the lowest percentage of students agreeing. Few changes were observed in the percentages agreeing in 1985 or in the pattern across schools. The school means on these two items were averaged to produce an index of student-reported rejection of rules. School scores on this index are shown in Table IV-2.

There was little evidence at the school level that scores on this index were associated with student-reported status. The school with the highest score on rule rejection was Fairweather, which had the highest score on the status index in Table I-1. The school with the second-highest score on rejection was Adams, which had the lowest score on status. Hence rejection of penalties was to be found at both ends of the spectrum of socioeconomic conditions.

Students were also asked about the effect of stricter penalties on absenteeism. Each year, about half the students at each school agreed that stricter penalties would reduce skipping and cutting. Since, as reported earlier, nearly all teachers in each school agreed with a similar item on their questionnaire, evidently fewer students than teachers believed in the efficacy of penalties. Fairweather was the school with the lowest percentage agreeing--32 percent--just as its teachers were least likely to place

Table IV-2
Students' Attitudes Towards Penalties
(Percentage of students agreeing with questionnaire items and mean* of student responses in six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

			District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Questionnaire Item		(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
21. Skipping should be up to the student, with no penalties	% agree:	(84)	37	29	32	35	30	40
		(85)	35	31	34	35	36	40
	mean:	(84)	2.27	2.04	2.12	2.19	2.10	2.37
		(85)	2.19	2.09	2.16	2.21	2.23	2.36
19. Attendance should not count for grades	% agree:	(84)	45	46	44	41	38	52
		(85)	50	46	47	44	42	53
	mean:	(84)	2.45	2.44	2.40	2.32	2.28	2.62
		(85)	2.54	2.46	2.49	2.44	2.40	2.65
Index of rule rejection (Avg. of 21+19)		(84)	2.36	2.24	2.26	2.26	2.19	2.50
		(85)	2.36	2.28	2.32	2.32	2.32	2.50
20. Stricter penalties would reduce cutting	% agree:	(84)	50	50	53	49	42	32
		(85)	45	50	53	51	43	31
	mean:	(84)	2.50	2.49	2.57	2.46	2.33	2.07
		(85)	2.40	2.47	2.52	2.51	2.34	2.08
Number of students in sample		(84)	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
		(85)	755	792	967	916	906	1246

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

confidence in penalties. Fairweather students were also most likely to deny the legitimacy of penalties for skipping and cutting. All this evidence indicates a normative climate supporting selective cutting for academic purposes at Fairweather, although the differences in statistics based on questionnaire data were not as big as interview comments led us to expect.

In general, the picture presented by the student data is consistent with administrators', counselors', and teachers' descriptions of managing absenteeism as a difficult task. Although students know about the official penalties for skipping, substantial numbers of students do not believe in the efficacy of the penalties. Furthermore, only about half the students see rules as strictly enforced, and many students perceive opportunities for painless cutting among their classes.

This is not to say that students are not aware of administrative and teacher efforts. Buchanan students are more likely to report strict enforcement than at other District 1 schools. We suspect that a schoolwide thrust at enforcement is having an impact there. We discern a similar phenomenon at Dearborn in 1985. There is also evidence that students at Fairweather are aware of administrative efforts. Fairweather students apparently see more strict enforcement of rules in 1985. However, Fairweather students in 1985 also remain more likely than students at other schools to reject penalties, which indicates student resistance to efforts of administrators to make a relatively lenient situation stricter.

Students' Compliance with Attendance Rules

We finally come to evidence of student compliance with attendance rules. How did the six schools differ in actual rates of student absenteeism? The project obtained three kinds of evidence of student absenteeism: district records, teacher questionnaire responses, and student

questionnaire responses. We discuss each in turn and develop summary indices for each school on measures of absenteeism. We subsequently compare the pattern of scores on those indices across schools with patterns of scores on other indices developed over the course of this report.

From district records, we obtained data on the number of full days and half days each student in the six schools had been absent, for whatever reasons and whether or not excused. In District 1, these data came from district office tapes containing the records of the computer system of reporting period absences each day. A detailed account of full-day and half-day absences was presented in deJung and Duckworth (1985). A full-day absence was defined as a day on which the student had missed four or more periods; a half-day absence was defined as a day on which a student had missed one to three periods. For District 2, the data were obtained from records held by the private agency contracting with the district to store school records. In District 2, a full-day absence was defined differently among the three schools. Dearborn used the same definition as District 1. Fairweather defined it as a day on which the student missed five or more classes. Englewood defined it as a day on which the student missed six or more classes. Given that Englewood and Fairweather used more stringent criteria of full-day absences, we would expect their records to show fewer absences. Hence, comparisons involving these two schools must be tentative. Furthermore, District 2 data on full-day absences were unavailable in 1985. District 2 data on half-day absences were even harder to equate; they are omitted from this report.

Table IV-3 shows the school means of the number of full-day and, in District 1 alone, half-day absences per student recorded for all students in the questionnaire samples in each of the schools. Questionnaires were administered in both schools in the final term of the 1984 school year and in

Table IV-3
Rates of Student Absenteeism Among the Student Questionnaire Samples
(School means and percentages for spring term 1984, and winter term, 1985
based on district records)

		District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Item	Year	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
Full-day absences:							
Mean Days per Student	1984	4.25	3.39	3.44	2.53	2.46	2.32
	1985	4.38	2.67	3.20	*	*	*
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	10	8	8	4	4	4
	1985	10	6	7	*	*	*
Half-day absences:							
Mean Days per Student	1984	11.07	9.80	10.10	*	*	*
	1985	9.70	8.53	10.69	*	*	*
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	26	22	22	*	*	*
	1985	23	20	25	*	*	*
Average periods missed each class:							
Mean No. of Periods per Student	1984	6.62	5.22	5.53	5.84	4.67	5.02
	1985	6.67	4.76	5.59	5.87	5.59	5.70
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	15	12	12	10	8	9
(Index of Absenteeism)	1985	16	11	13	10	9	10
No. students in sample	1984	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
	1985	755	792	967	916	906	1246

* Half-day absence data for District 2 schools are unreliable and hence omitted; 1985 full-day absence data for District 2 schools unavailable.

** Spring term, 1984, included 45 days in District 1 and 57 days in District 2; winter term, 1985, included 43 days in District 1 and 60 days in District 2.

the winter term of the 1985 school year. Because these terms were half-semesters in District 1 and trimesters in District 2, we divided the number of days absent by the number of school days in each term in each District to obtain the average percentage of school days in the term on which each student was absent. Those percentages are shown in Table IV-3. We now draw comparisons within each district on these data.

Among the District 1 schools, Adams had the highest number of full-day absences. The students at Adams had an average of 4.25 full-day absences per student during the spring term of 1984. This corresponded to 10 percent of the days in the term, or one day every two weeks on average. There was scarcely any difference between Buchanan and Coolidge, each of which had fewer full-day absences than Adams--8 percent of the term.

Appendix A provides statistics on the total student enrollment at each school. As compared to the questionnaire sample, the total student enrollment had a higher average of full-day absences at all schools. For example, the statistics at Adams were 5.29 days or 13 percent of the days in the term compared to 4.25 days per student in the sample. Similar differences were noted for all other statistics provided in Table IV-3. These differences were expected. Students who were frequently absent were less likely to be in school when the questionnaire was administered or when follow-up attempts were made to collect questionnaires from students who had been absent the day of administration.

In 1985, the mean full-day absences per student rose at Adams and dropped at Buchanan and Coolidge. In addition, the drop was greater at Buchanan, with the result that Buchanan clearly had fewer absences than Coolidge in 1985.

With respect to half-day absences in the three District 1 schools (days on which the student had missed 1 to 3 classes), Adams again in 1984

had the highest mean--11.07 days per student, or 26 percent of the days in the term. This corresponds to an average of one to three classes every four days, or more than once a week. Coolidge had the second highest mean--10.10 days per student, or 22 percent of the days. Buchanan had the lowest mean half-day absences--9.80, also 22 percent of the days. In 1985, the means at Adams and Buchanan both dropped about 1.3 days, while the mean at Coolidge rose about half a day. As a result, Coolidge had a higher mean in 1985 than Adams. This suggests that absences from particular classes rose at Coolidge while full-day absences fell slightly.

From the data in Table IV-3, one can see that the rate of half-day absences was two to three times the rate of full-day absences in each of these schools. If one were to add the percentages of half-day absences to the percentages of full-day absences, one would find that on the average, one third of the students in each of the District 1 schools missed one or more classes every day. These statistics are consistent with the thick computer printouts of daily period absences we observed in the offices. They confirm the administrators', counselors', and teachers' accounts of the overwhelming nature of the task of managing absenteeism in these schools.

The means of District 2 schools were very much alike in 1984, despite the different criteria for full-day absences. The mean full-day absences (when the student missed all or nearly all classes) for all students at Dearborn was 2.53, or 4 percent of the days in the term (about one day a month on average). The corresponding means at Englewood and Fairweather were 2.46 and 2.32, each of which also corresponded to 4 percent of the days in the term. These slight differences could be accounted for by the differences in criteria for full-day absences. The main finding is that the percentage of full-day absences in the District 2 schools was only half the percentage in the District 1 schools. We were unable to obtain 1985 data on full-day

absences from District 2. And, as mentioned, half-day absence statistics in 1984 were suspect and therefore omitted.

A more useful source of data on student absences was the students' report cards for the final grading period of the 1984 school year. Along with the students' grades, teachers reported the number of days each student had missed each class during the term. We compared this data with the computer system's data in District 1 and judged it to be more complete than the latter. Given the difficulties encountered above in comparing full-day absence statistics across the two districts, we chose this data for such comparison. We computed an average for each student of the number of times during the term that student had missed each of the classes in which he or she was enrolled. We then computed a school mean on these student averages. Finally we computed the percentage of class periods in the term that this mean represented. Table IV-3 shows these means and percentages for the student questionnaire sample in each school. Appendix A shows the statistics for the total student enrollment.

The 1984 statistics show that Adams had the highest mean on periods missed per student that year--6.62 periods per class per student or 15 percent of the periods in each class during the term. This corresponds to each student missing each class once every seven school days. Coolidge exhibited a higher mean on this measure than Buchanan--5.53 compared to 5.22. In 1985, these means rose slightly at Adams and Coolidge but dropped about half a day at Buchanan. The pattern of differences in the three District 1 schools was maintained. Within District 2, Englewood emerged with the lowest mean periods missed each year and Dearborn with the highest. In 1985, however, the differences were slight, because of substantial increases in the means at Englewood and Fairweather.

While the means cannot be compared across districts, the percentages

can. All three District 1 schools had higher percentages on periods missed than District 2 schools each year, although the differences were less pronounced than one would have inferred from the percentages of full-day absences. In particular, Buchanan's percentage in 1985 was only one point higher than percentages at Dearborn or Fairweather. This indicates that full-day absence measures under-represented the real rate of absenteeism more in District 2 than in District 1. We will use the percentage of periods missed as an index of each school's recorded rate of student absenteeism. This index shows that Adams had the most absenteeism and Englewood the least.

Our second source of data on student absenteeism also came from teacher reports, but in this case from responses to our questionnaire rather than school reporting forms. The teacher questionnaire asked teachers to think about all their classes and estimate how many of their students were absent on an average day. Item 10 on Table IV-4 shows the percentage of teachers in each school, each year, responding that 20 percent (1 in 5) or more of the students were absent on an average day. It is apparent that more than half the Adams teachers each year perceived that at least 20 percent of their students were absent each day. These percentages (67 percent in 1984 and 59 percent in 1985) and the corresponding means were the highest observed. Buchanan had the next highest percentage of teachers each year--a third or more--reporting that at least 1 in 5 students was absent each day, and Coolidge had the third highest statistics each year. Thus teacher responses to this questionnaire item confirm the finding from school record data that District 1 had more absences than District 2 and that Adams had the most absences. In 1984, the Coolidge mean was closer to the Buchanan mean than the percentages would suggest. In 1985, however, because fewer Buchanan teachers checked the lowest response to this item than in 1984, Buchanan's mean rose even though the percentage reporting 20 percent or more absences

Table IV-4
Teachers' Reports of Student Absenteeism
(Percentage of teachers selecting questionnare responses and mean* of teacher responses in each of six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

Questionnaire Item		(Year)	District 1 Schools: Adam	Buch	Cool	District 2 Schools: Dear	Engl	Fair
10. Thinking about all your classes, how many students are absent on an average day?	% 20%+:	(84)	67	40	31	20	10	10
		(85)	59	33	19	12	9	17
	mean:	(84)	2.69	2.13	2.11	1.85	1.58	1.57
		(85)	2.63	2.19	1.98	1.71	1.53	1.85
28. Class cutting is a problem in this school	% str.agree:	(84)	66	54	43	53	27	36
		(85)	65	48	48	45	22	48
	mean:	(84)	3.63	3.50	3.30	3.49	3.12	3.24
		(85)	3.60	3.48	3.40	3.40	2.98	3.42
13. How many student absences would you say are legitimate?	% <half:	(84)	74	60	45	67	47	34
		(85)	72	49	46	62	47	35
	mean:	(84)	1.93	2.23	2.49	2.14	2.60	2.74
		(85)	1.93	2.51	2.41	2.24	2.65	2.80
Index of teacher-reported cutting (10+28-13)		(84)	4.39	3.40	2.92	2.80	2.10	2.07
		(85)	4.30	3.16	2.97	2.87	1.86	2.47
6. How would you compare the number of unexcused absences in your classes this year to last year?**	% more:	(84)	49	16	33	30	25	25
		(85)	29	8	14	12	6	16
	% less:	(84)	10	33	19	30	15	25
		(85)	5	28	20	37	27	36
39. I have cutting well controlled in my classes	% agree:	(85)	43	51	50	56	64	55
	mean:	(85)	2.29	2.68	2.60	2.60	2.69	2.57
Number of teachers in sample		(84)	42	47	47	51	60	52
		(85)	43	43	59	57	58	64

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
10: 1=<10%; 2=10%; 3=20%; 4=30%; 5=>30%.
13: 1=1/5 or less; 2=2/5; 3=3/5; 4=4/5; 5=nearly all
28, 39: 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree

**"new here; don't know" responses not included in computations

each day declined from 40 percent to 33 percent. This very small increase in the mean, accompanied by a somewhat greater decrease in the Coolidge mean, made the ordering of these three school on this measure clearer in 1985. This ordering differed from the index of school-reported absence, in which Coolidge placed slightly higher than Buchanan.

In District 2, there was a little more change from 1984 to 1985. In 1984, 20 percent of the Dearborn teachers reported that 1 in 5 students was absent each day, compared to only 10 percent of the teachers at Englewood and Fairweather. In 1985, the differences between Dearborn and Fairweather was reversed. Fairweather teachers now reported the most absences in District 2. Englewood, meanwhile, exhibited a decrease in the mean response to this item, giving it the lowest mean of all the schools in 1985. Thus the ordering of District 2 schools on this item in 1984 paralleled the ordering on the index of school-reported absenteeism.

Up to this point, we have been discussing statistics on absenteeism overall. The teacher questionnaire data allow us to focus on unauthorized absences from class. As mentioned in Section III, the questionnaire asked how strongly teachers agreed that class cutting was a problem in their school. Eighty percent or more of the teachers in each school, each year, agreed with this item. Item 28 in Table IV-4 shows the percentages strongly agreeing, along with the means. In each school, each year, with one exception, the mean response to this item was between "agree (3)" and "strongly agree (4)." We find that nearly two-thirds of the Adams teachers, and on average half of the Buchanan and Dearborn teachers, strongly agreed with this statement each year. We also observe that the percentages of Fairweather teachers strongly agreeing rose from 36 percent in 1984 to 48 percent in 1985, indicating increasing concern. Otherwise, fluctuations from 1984 to 1985 were slight. The one exception to majority agreement is

Englewood in 1985, where the percentage strongly agreeing was only 27 percent in 1984 and 22 percent in 1985.

The teacher questionnaire also asked about the proportion of student absences that the teacher felt were legitimate. We interpret this as an inverse measure of the proportion of absences that are not or should not be excused. Item 13 on Table IV-4 shows the percentages of teachers in each school, each year, reporting that less than half the reasons were legitimate, thereby implying that more than half the absences were--or should have been treated as--unexcused. Nearly three-fourths of the teachers at Adams each year reported that less than half the student absences were legitimate. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers at Dearborn each year reported likewise. Buchanan, Coolidge, and Englewood statistics on this measure fell into a middle ground, while at Fairweather, scarcely more than a third of the teachers each year responded that less than half the student absences were legitimate. Also reported are means, which correspond roughly to the number of legitimate absences in every five absences.

These three measures were combined into a composite index of teacher-reported student cutting at each school. This index was computed by adding the means on items 10 and 28 and then subtracting the mean on item 13. Scores are shown in Table IV-4. They show that each year, just as with the index of school-recorded absenteeism, Adams had the highest scores on teacher-reported cutting. Englewood and Fairweather had the lowest.

The questionnaire also asked whether teachers perceived more, the same amount of, or less unexcused absences in their classes than the previous year. Shown in item 6 on Table IV-4 are percentages reporting more and percentages reporting less each year. The perception that class cutting was increasing was most widespread at Adams, where 49 percent of the teachers responded "more" in 1984, dropping to 29 percent in 1985. In 1985, at all

schools, lower percentages of teachers reported that cutting was increasing. The perception that class cutting was decreasing was most widespread at Buchanan and Dearborn in 1984, and this perception was fairly stable across the two years, although larger percentages of teachers at Englewood and Fairweather also reported that cutting was decreasing in 1985.

In 1985, we added an item to the teacher questionnaire asking how strongly they agreed or disagreed that "I believe I have cutting reasonably well controlled in my classes." While this item cannot be used in cross-year comparisons, the percentages and means reported in item 39 in Table IV-4 confirm our general impression that Englewood teachers were least bothered by cutting (64 percent agreed that they had had it controlled), and that Adams teachers were most bothered (only 43 percent agreed). Otherwise, the differences between schools were smaller than expected.

Our third and final source of data on absence came from the student questionnaire, where the focus was exclusively on unexcused absences. Students were asked how often they and their friends cut classes. They were also asked how many days they had skipped since the last school vacation. The results are shown in Table IV-5.

Let us first compare the schools on students' self-report of cutting classes. Although it is not included in Table IV-5, the percentage of students cutting frequently--three or more times a week--was higher at Adams and lower at Englewood than at other schools. In addition, it should be noted that from 51 percent (Fairweather) to 65 percent (Buchanan) of the students reported "hardly ever" cutting.

Item 36 on Table IV-5 shows the percentage of students reporting that they cut classes at least once a week (as opposed to "less than once a week" or "hardly ever") and means of student responses. The school with the highest statistics each year was Adams. In 1984, 30 percent of Adams

Table IV-5
Students' Reports of Skipping School and Cutting Class
(Percentage of students agreeing with questionnaire items and mean* of student responses in six schools in 1984 and 1985)

Questionnaire Item		(Year)	District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
			Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
36. Not counting full-day absences, how often do you cut a class?	% wkly. or more:	(84)	30	19	23	24	18	24
		(85)	33	14	24	22	20	24
	mean:	(84)	1.92	1.60	1.73	1.77	1.64	1.81
		(85)	1.99	1.49	1.79	1.77	1.73	1.80
35. How often do you think most of your friends cut classes in this school?	% wkly. or more:	(84)	63	46	51	51	46	54
		(85)	71	46	51	57	48	62
	mean:	(84)	2.92	2.41	2.52	2.54	2.40	2.55
		(85)	3.11	2.43	2.54	2.63	2.46	2.78
33. Since spring break, how many full days of school have you skipped without an excuse?**	adj. % any:	(84)	37	23	25	23	23	24
	adj. mean:	(84)	0.96	0.55	0.80	0.49	0.46	0.48
37. Since Christmas break, how many full days of school have you skipped without an excuse?**	adj. % any:	(85)	55	30	40	34	29	33
	adj. mean:	(85)	1.01	0.59	0.65	0.55	0.44	0.45
Index of student-reported cutting (Avg. of 36+35+33/37)		(84)	1.93	1.52	1.68	1.60	1.50	1.61
		(85)	2.04	1.50	1.66	1.65	1.54	1.68
Number of students in sample		(84)	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
		(85)	755	792	967	916	906	1246

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
36, 35: 1=hardly ever; 2=<wkly; 3=wkly; 4=3-4 times/wk; 5=5+times/wk
33: 0=no days; 1=1 day; 2=2 days; 3=3 days; 4=4 or more days
37: 0=no days; 1=1-3 days; 2=4-5 days; 3=6-7 days; 4=8 or more days

**See Appendix B for unadjusted statistics and description of adjustment formula

students, rising to 33 percent in 1985, reported cutting a class at least once a week. The increase at Adams does not accord with the decline in percentage of Adams teachers' reporting (Table IV-4) that cutting was on the increase. The school with the lowest means each year was Buchanan, which is surprising given the relatively high scores obtained by that school on the two indices of absenteeism already discussed. The fact that a lower percentage of students at Buchanan in 1985 than in 1984 reported weekly cutting does accord, however, with Buchanan teachers' reports that cutting was decreasing. In contrast, the stable statistics at Dearborn and Fairweather do not accord with those teachers' reports that cutting was decreasing.

The questionnaire also asked students how often most of their friends cut classes. Item 35 in Table IV-5 shows percentages and means. It was amusing to note that twice as many students reported that most of their friends cut at least once a week as reported that they themselves cut at least once a week. As with self-reported cutting, the highest percentage each year of students reporting that their friends cut at least weekly was at Adams--63 percent in 1984 climbing to 71 percent in 1985. Also, the lowest percentages each year were at Buchanan and Englewood--just under half the students each year.

In addition to questions about rates of cutting classes, the student questionnaire each year included a question about the number of whole days the student had skipped without an excuse since the last vacation. Comparison of schools on this measure is complicated by the fact that the questionnaire was administered at different times of the year in 1984 and 1985. In 1984, the questionnaire was scheduled to be administered approximately three weeks after spring vacation. In 1985, the questionnaire was scheduled to be administered approximately seven weeks after Christmas

vacation. Because it is reasonable to assume that the number of days of skipping would increase with the number of days elapsed, the response options for the 1985 question were approximately twice the number of days as the response options for the 1984 question. For example, in 1984 the highest response was "4 or more days;" in 1985, the highest response was "8 or more days."

An additional problem arose from last-minute schedule changes that resulted each year in different schools administering the questionnaire on different days. Within-year comparisons must also adjust for the different number of days the student could have skipped--i.e., the number of school days since vacation. The method of adjusting scores is described in Appendix B, which also reports the unadjusted statistics. While far from perfect, it does allow us to include valuable data in our index of student-reported cutting (described below) that otherwise would be lost.

Items 33 and 37 in Table IV-5 thus reports adjusted percentages and means--our estimates of what the percentages of students reporting any skipping and the means would be each year if the questionnaire had been given in all six schools on the same day--the day the first school gave it each year.

When these corrections were made, we observed that the adjusted percentages of students reporting any skipping during the three weeks after spring vacation, 1984 were 37 percent at Adams and 23-25 percent at the other five schools. Although the percentages were virtually the same at those schools, the adjusted 1984 mean at Coolidge (.80) was greater than the means at the other four schools. This indicates that the students who reported skipping at Coolidge skipped more days than students at those schools. Hence we would describe the 1984 student-reported rate of skipping as highest at Adams, next highest at Coolidge, and roughly similar at the four remaining

schools. This statement can also be made about the 1985 statistics overall. It is difficult to compare the percentages across the years, because the same response—"no days"--is being applied to different intervals. Likewise, the adjustments and the differences in response options make us cautious in interpreting the small differences in the means across the years.

We averaged means on these three items to create a single index of student-reported cutting. School scores on this index for each year are included in Table IV-5. Each year Adams had the highest scores. Englewood and Buchanan had the lowest scores each year. Also, Coolidge had the second highest score on this index in 1984, followed closely by Fairweather and Dearborn.

The school scores on each of the indices of absenteeism are collected in Table IV-6, along with school scores on the other indices developed in this report. How congruent are the distributions of scores in the three absenteeism indices?

First, the distribution of scores on the two absenteeism indices derived from teacher reports (report cards and questionnaires) are very similar. These are presented in the table as "School-recorded absenteeism" (report cards) and "Teacher-reported cutting" (questionnaires). Adams clearly has the highest scores on those indices. After Adams, Buchanan and Coolidge have the highest scores. The school-recorded absenteeism index suggests that Coolidge's rate of absences rose slightly in 1985 while Buchanan's fell, and this is replicated in the teacher-reported cutting index, although on that index Buchanan has clearly higher scores than Coolidge.

District 2 scores on these indices are lower, although Dearborn's scores are only slightly below the lowest District 1 scores. Each year, Dearborn has the highest scores in District 2, although Fairweather's score

Table IV-6
Summary of School Scores on Absenteeism and Other Indices
(Scores in six high schools in 1984 and 1985)

		District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Index	(Year)	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
Student-reported status	(84)	2.80	3.12	4.12	3.88	4.42	5.20
(Table I-1)	(85)	2.88	3.22	4.03	3.99	4.50	5.24
School-recorded absenteeism	(84)	15	12	12	10	8	9
(Table IV-3)	(85)	16	11	13	10	9	10
Teacher-reported cutting	(84)	4.39	3.40	2.92	2.80	2.10	2.07
(Table IV-4)	(85)	4.30	3.16	2.97	2.87	1.86	2.47
Student-reported cutting	(84)	1.93	1.52	1.68	1.60	1.50	1.61
(Table IV-5)	(85)	2.04	1.50	1.66	1.65	1.54	1.68
Student-reported enforcement	(84)	2.38	2.56	2.36	2.46	2.40	2.52
(Table IV-1)	(85)	2.44	2.56	2.36	2.44	2.44	2.76
Student-reported rule rejection	(84)	2.36	2.24	2.26	2.26	2.19	2.50
(Table IV-2)	(85)	2.36	2.28	2.32	2.32	2.32	2.50
Teacher-reported enforcement	(84)	2.39	2.54	2.25	2.43	2.28	2.15
(Table III-4)	(85)	2.45	2.53	2.27	2.66	2.23	2.37
Teacher-reported satisfaction	(84)	2.14	2.33	2.39	2.34	2.36	2.57
(Table III-5)	(85)	2.53	2.58	2.47	3.07	2.32	2.71

Furthermore, except for the 1984 scores on teacher-reported cutting, each year Englewood has the lowest scores in District 2 and therefore the lowest scores in the sample.

We observe that the general ordering on these two indices from highest to lowest--Adams, Buchanan-Coolidge, Dearborn, Fairweather-Englewood--bears an overall similarity to the ordering of schools on the index of student-reported socioeconomic status displayed in Table I-1 and reproduced in Table IV-6. This suggests that these differences are in part attributable to differences in the communities served by the school.

When we turn to the index of student-reported cutting, however, we observe a sharp departure from the pattern suggested by socioeconomic status. While Adams continues to have the highest score on cutting, we find that Buchanan has nearly the lowest score in 1984 and the lowest score in 1985. Thus Buchanan students report less cutting than would be predicted from the indices of absenteeism derived from teacher reports or the index of socioeconomic status. The other main departure from previous orderings is that Fairweather has a higher score on the index of student-reported cutting than other District 2 schools (and Buchanan) in 1984, and this score rose also above Coolidge's in 1985 to become the second-highest score in the sample. Thus Fairweather students report more cutting than either their teachers' reports or their own status reports would suggest.

Before turning to comparison of absenteeism data with rule enforcement data, we also note that these anomalies in scores on student-reported cutting were compatible with the pattern of scores in student-reported rejection of rules, also reproduced in Table IV-6. On that index, Buchanan had lower scores each year than all other schools except Englewood (which had low scores on student-reported cutting as well). Also on that index, Fairweather had the highest scores each year. Thus these

anomalies may be attributable in part to the degree of acceptance of schools' authority to enforce penalties for cutting. With that in mind, let us now return to data on such enforcement.

Table IV-6 displays the summary indices of student-reported and teacher-reported strictness of rule enforcement (from Tables IV-1 and III-4, respectively). We observe that in 1984 Buchanan has a higher score than either Adams or Coolidge on student perceptions of enforcement. This difference, compared to Buchanan students' lower score on student-reported cutting, suggests that Buchanan students' perception of strict rule enforcement may help to account for their relatively low report of cutting, and possibly may also account for the decline in school-recorded absenteeism relative to Coolidge in 1985. However, we also observe that in 1984 Fairweather has a higher score than either Dearborn or Englewood on student-reported rule enforcement. Yet Fairweather also has a higher score than either of those two schools on rates of student-reported cutting. So strictness does not seem to have the same effect at that school as at Buchanan.

The teacher-reported index of strict enforcement, introduced in Table III-4, also showed that Buchanan had higher scores than Adams and Coolidge, which is consistent with student perceptions of rule enforcement and adds further to our argument that strictness reduces absenteeism. Furthermore, Fairweather had lower scores on teacher-reported enforcement than Dearborn and Englewood, which is also consistent with our argument. In fact, the disparity between Fairweather teachers' and students' relative scores on enforcement suggests that Fairweather students saw rules as so strictly enforced because so many of them resented the rules. In fact, despite new administrative efforts to impose penalties on cutting, teachers at that school were not as strict as at Dearborn and Englewood.

Thus we can account for the anomalies of Buchanan's low and Fairweather's high rates of student-reported cutting in terms of differential rule enforcement interacting with differential rejection of rules. The fact remains, however, that they are anomalies not only in terms of socioeconomic status but also in terms of teacher reports of student absenteeism on both report card and questionnaire. Does this mean that they are spurious?

Closer inspection of the indices of absenteeism based on teacher reports reveals that these differences are present there also, although at much more muted levels. Buchanan students are recorded absent slightly less often than at Coolidge, and Fairweather students are recorded absent slightly more often than at Englewood. Furthermore, in 1985, Fairweather teachers report more cutting than Englewood teachers. (If it were not for the greater propensity for Fairweather teachers to see absences as legitimate, their index of student cutting would be higher than Englewood's in 1984 as well.) Hence the student-reported index magnifies rather than distorts the apparent interactive effect of rule enforcement and rule rejection at those schools.

This analysis of correlates of student absenteeism at the school level is exploratory, even with the two years' data we have assembled. We suspect that student absenteeism is determined by important individual differences among students, which may be greater within a school than across schools. We also expect that selective class cutting is determined by important individual differences among teachers within a school as well. For these reasons, we have conducted parallel analyses of the data at the student and teacher levels and have reported findings in separate papers (Duckworth and deJung 1986; deJung and Duckworth 1986). In general, we do find substantial variation within school, although we have accounted for only a small portion of that variation. However, those analyses do not address the issues of this report: the overall effect of differences in school

management on students enrolled at a school.

V. Conclusions

This report has attempted to construct a description of the procedures high schools use to manage student absenteeism. Information was collected at six urban high schools in the Northwest during the school years ending in 1984 and 1985. In addition, the report has attempted to compare those schools each year on staff implementation and satisfaction with those procedures. A special aspect of this comparative analysis was the identification of changes in procedures during the 1985 school year and investigation of evidence about the impact of those changes on staff implementation and satisfaction. Finally, the report has investigated the influence of school procedures on rates of student absence. Given a sample of only six schools, we were limited to comparison of schools on two variables at a time, although we tried to use information about the socioeconomic status of the community served by each school to identify relationships among variables that could not be explained simply in terms of different problems presented by different communities.

The main themes of the report were announced in advance in the set of issues presented at the beginning:

> What is the appropriate strategy for computerizing and centralizing the monitoring and recording of attendance?
>
> What is the school's responsibility in clearing or excusing absences?
>
> Whose responsibility is it to impose penalties for unexcused absences? How effective are these penalties?
>
> What is the school's responsibility in intervening in patterns of chronic absenteeism, other than disenrolling the student involved?

We shall now try to summarize the implications of our descriptive and comparative analyses in terms of these issues.

Monitoring and Recording Attendance

First, under what conditions are computerization and centralization of attendance monitoring worth the effort? During the 1984 school year, the three schools in District 1 were in the second year of implementation of a district-based computerized reporting system, which was improved by the addition of Scantron sheets in 1985. By all accounts, the introduction of this system had been a slow and sometimes frustrating process; one of the high schools was unwilling to abandon its older, less detailed records until the 1985 school year. The effort required for such a change was also manifested in the three District 2 schools, which were experimenting with school-based microcomputer systems. Fairweather introduced a system in 1984 and refined it in 1985; Englewood introduced a system in 1985 and sustained it with refinements; Dearborn introduced a system in 1985 and dropped it after one term. All three schools reported major administrative overhead and disruption of normal services during the initial implementation period.

Furthermore, more data is not necessarily more useful data. Administrators sometimes threw up their hands in the face of inch-thick computer printouts of students absences. With as many as a third of the student body missing one or more classes each day, a complete listing of absentees could be paralyzing. Centralization of computer records in District 1 made it impractical to attempt to correct records by clearing excused absences. Hence listings would include excused along with unexcused absences. In this respect, the school-based microcomputer systems being introduced in District 2 were more flexible.

We found little evidence that computerizing and centralizing records affected teachers' own record keeping in their grade books. In fact, in District 1, lists of absences on student report cards, derived from teachers'

District 1, lists of absences on student report cards, derived from teachers' grade books, seemed to be more complete than the central office records. Nor was there evidence that computerizing records affected teacher satisfaction. The introduction of a school-based computer system was accompanied in one school (Fairweather) by increases in teacher reports of rule enforcement and of satisfaction but in another school (Englewood) by decreases. With respect to impact on students, we observe that those two schools exhibited increases in percentages of students agreeing that rules were strictly enforced; they also exhibited increases, however, in rates of school-reported absenteeism and student-reported cutting.

We would speculate that the future belongs to a combination of the two systems in use in District 1 and District 2. A centralized system for long-term monitoring of attendance and permanent record keeping, branching into school-based microcomputer systems for short-term monitoring and feedback, may combine the efficiencies of the District 1 system with the responsiveness of the District 2 system. In fact, some District 2 schools were considering connecting their micros to new centralized computer files maintained by the private agency with which District 2 presently contracted for permanent recording of full-day absences.

Excusing Absences

The excusing of student absences generally is left up to teachers, but many teachers are frustrated by this responsibility and by perceived inconsistency among other teachers. Some would like to do away with the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Administrators, however, are aware that this would create as many problems with parents as it would solve with teachers. Attempts by some administrators to centralize the excusing process at the office seem to have worked, especially at Buchanan,

which had high scores on teacher-reported and student-reported enforcement and also one of the lowest rates of student-reported cutting. Other administrators, however, felt that teachers were better judges of the legitimacy of an excuse and therefore better able to deter student attempts to cover up skipping.

The question of the school's responsibility brings up the question of parents' responsibility. Discussions with interviewees about excuses revealed dissatisfaction with parents' adherence to predefined criteria for excuses. Parents were seen as wanting exceptions to be made for their children, which was interpreted by teachers as parents assigning low priority to the school's program. Furthermore, especially in District 1, parents were seen as colluding with students to cover up skipping. Finally, and in general, parents were seen as insufficiently aware of their children's activities.

All of these problems in parent-school relationships were likely to come to a head with the introduction in several schools of routine and in some cases automatic telephone calling in the event of student absences. The goal was for parents to be made more aware of absences and thus confront students about illegitimate absences. Furthermore, such systems are designed to make schools aware of parents who seemed uninterested in or uncandid about their children's whereabouts. Such awareness might be limited, however, with the use of tape-recorded messages and automatic dialing machines as at Adams and Fairweather. It is possible that the personal contact used systematically at Buchanan, Englewood, and--to a lesser extent--Dearborn will be more effective in alerting parents to the school's criteria for excuses. Even more probable, personal contact may be more effective in alerting school personnel to uncooperative parents than all-inclusive but impersonal automated contact such as that used at Adams and Fairweather. This

question--whether using new computer resources to widen but automate school-home communication is inferior to using human resources in a more limited but adaptable effort--cannot be answered with our data, but it should be kept in mind.

Imposing Penalties

The imposition of penalties for unexcused absences also is complex. There are immediate symbolic penalties like makeup-time, detention, and Saturday School; there are the gradual, "natural" penalties of loss of academic credit; there are the catalytic penalties of notification of parents and suspension from school; and there are the ultimate penalties of course withdrawal and disenrollment. How these are orchestrated for different students seems to be up to staff discretion. There were differences of opinion among administrators on this topic, however. Some preferred the cut-and-dried imposition of penalties according to the book; others, generally in the more educated communities, felt that different penalties were effective with different students. Most administrators felt that it was more effective for teachers to impose penalties than for them to wait for the school to take action.

It was apparent from our data that teachers are ambivalent at best about imposing penalties. Substantial percentages of teachers in District 2 schools checked "does not apply" in response to questions about assigning penalties or reducing students' grades for repeated unexcused absences. Moreover, teachers' use of these penalties declined from 1984 to 1985 in all schools. Dearborn illustrated the failure of an attempt to get all teachers to use reduction in student credit in response to absences. The decline in teacher efforts to impose penalties was accompanied by increases in five out of six schools in teachers' rating of strictness of administrative

enforcement of penalties. Hence the tendency may be towards more cut-and-dried methods managed by personnel in the school office. Fairweather's introduction of mandatory Saturday-School-or-suspension into a situation where teachers previously had substantial discretion in their handling of class absences is indicative.

Did the shift from teacher responsibility for penalties to administrator responsibility seem to increase the effectiveness of rule enforcement? Buchanan exhibited stricter policy enforcement in 1984 than the other two District 1 schools, and Buchanan had lower student-reported rates of unexcused absences. This situation was stable or even better in 1985. In comparison, the rate of absence at Coolidge, where one might expect lower rates because of substantially higher percentages of college-bound students, was scarcely better than Buchanan, perhaps because of its laxer enforcement. Coolidge's unexcused absences increased in 1985. Effects of strictness at Adams proved difficult to determine. It clearly was the school most seriously hit by absenteeism. A change in administrative staff in 1985 indicated movement to tighten up monitoring and increase intervention, but this change, while perhaps responsible for increased staff satisfaction with administration, had produced no positive effect on student attendance, which declined further in 1985.

Further evidence on the efficacy of strictness was observed in District 2. Dearborn evidenced increased strictness in 1985, which was related to sharply increased staff satisfaction but no evidence of reduced absenteeism. Fairweather also relied on strict enforcement to turn around a situation where class cutting was normatively accepted by most students and many teachers. The evidence for effectiveness is mixed also here; the increase in staff satisfaction was offset by actual increases in indices of absenteeism.

In sum, increased administrative strictness was accompanied by increases in teacher satisfaction with school procedures but very scant accompanying evidence that student absenteeism declined in response.

In fact, administrators and counselors were aware that penalties were likely to work only if students wanted to remain in school. Hence moving towards strictness might work in a high school like Fairweather, where most students planned to go to college, but it might lead to an increased dropout rate at a school like Adams, where few students planned postsecondary education. Thus any tendency towards administration of cut-and-dried penalties would seem to require renewed efforts at the school level to intervene early with students whose fundamental educational motivation is weak and thus whose response to penalties is likely to be further withdrawal.

Intervening

The issue of intervention in vicious cycles of student absenteeism and academic failure is always controversial in high schools. The sheer numbers of students in relationship to the handful of administrators and counselors, the independence and rebelliousness of adolescents, and the widening network of distractions and alternative activities available to adolescents, make intervention at best only occasional and hit-or-miss.

Only about half the teachers reported regularly informing counselors regarding students who had missed several classes without excuses. Counselors, on their part, despaired of responding to the full list of academic warning notices sent out at midterm. Yet teachers were unlikely to make efforts to contact parents, and such efforts as they reported to us declined from 1984 to 1985. Furthermore, many teachers felt that nothing could be done to correct students who skipped frequently, even though many agreed on principle that students with academic problems should receive help.

Given this counselor overload and teacher ambivalence, the issue of intervention seemed to hang on administrative leadership. In fact, such leadership seemed to emerge in some schools from the new attempts to computerize and centralize the monitoring of attendance and from efforts to install routine telephoning of parents. Administrators in some schools began to develop "short lists" of 100 to 150 students whose attendance would be monitored regularly; furthermore, students on those lists would be taken on as "cases" by an administrator or counselor whose persistent efforts might force the student to take impending consequences for truancy seriously. Regular monitoring increased administrator interaction with teachers about problems, which might pressure teachers to alter treatment of specific students but more generally prepared the way for routine administrator approval of teacher decisions to drop students from courses. Regular monitoring, on the other hand, alerted school personnel to home problems that might warrant the services of the school social worker and to learning problems that might warrant placing the student in a special program designed to correct both academic and attendance behavior. Even such intensive efforts had only about a 50 percent success rate, however.

Given such halfway measures to intervene, one might expect administrators to turn to disenrollment readily in the case of chronic absentees. This was not the case, however. Oversight ("absent students are carried by the system") and even conscious reluctance to act were more common administrative responses to legally-mandated disenrollment after ten consecutive unexcused absences. Administrators in general were lenient, according to teachers, and in our interviews, they seemed more worried about the long-term consequences to students from dropping out (or being expelled) than were teachers worried about the consequences to students of being dropped from a particular class.

Managing Student Absenteeism is a Complex Process

Although we have summarized the informational value of findings on the relationship of specific procedures to rates of student absenteeism, we hope that this report will dispel myths that single strategies (such as strong principals) are the answer to student absenteeism. The overlapping management procedures for monitoring and recording attendance, excusing absences, and responding to unexcused absences add up to a complex organizational system of action involving various school administrators, teachers, counselors, and auxiliary actors including social workers and student office workers. Making changes in any of these systems is a major undertaking.

Can such an undertaking be sufficiently effective to be worth the trouble? To some extent, the frustration and/or resignation expressed by many of the administrators, counselors, and teachers we interviewed suggests not. However, that very frustration and weariness itself seems to call out for new leadership if school personnel are not to develop burnout. The evidence indicates that leadership is appreciated by staff members and recognized by students. The evidence does not indicate the degree of cooperation and common effort among teachers, counselors, and administrators necessary to translate leadership into a strong enough change in the daily environment of students so as to inhibit their tendencies to skip and cut. For example, we observed that in 1984 Fairweather teachers were most satisfied of all. We suggested that those teachers appreciated their administrator's efforts to reduce absences. Given the low score on teacher-reported enforcement, however, this data also suggests complacency. The increase in strictness in 1985 was largely due to administrative efforts, with little increase in teachers' own strictness. It may be that teacher

practice at Fairweather was not changing sufficiently to translate new administrative procedures into reduced absenteeism.

Perhaps the full implementation of school procedures by teachers requires a broader mandate than simply reducing absenteeism. The interview material contained suggestions that some schools, especially Adams, need curricular reform and that all schools need help for teachers who are not currently able to make their classes rewarding or interesting to students. It is debatable that intervention in the more serious cases is beyond the capacity of schools, but students who themselves reported little or no cutting provided testimony that some classes gave them little in return for regular attendance (especially when considering how the time might be applied to work for other classes). This suggests that cutting is likely to be perceived by students as a rational response to some situations.

We side with those who argue for more clearcut consequences for skipping and cutting and think that students would benefit from the increased demand for responsibility and performance (even to the point of working to get something out of a class that is poorly taught). We worry, however, that increased strictness in itself, in light of what has been revealed about shortcomings in curriculum and instruction, would place the administration in the role of school police officers rather than educational leaders. Likewise, in view of the interconnection between academic ability and absence, strictness in itself may have the effect of increasing the dropout rate of lower-achieving students. Such students may pay a penalty later of deficits in basic skills necessary for employment that the high school might have developed. Thus, we advocate pairing increased strictness with more ambitious interventions into the academic problems of chronic truants, including efforts to improve teaching quality and make classes seem more interesting or relevant. The outcomes of such interventions will be

increased student skills, and such outcomes may have greater reward value for administrators than reduced skipping. Managing absenteeism may be more effective where such a dual strategy is employed.

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Appendix A
Rates of Student Absenteeism for All Students Enrolled in Six High Schools
(School means and percentages based on district and school records
in spring term, 1984, and winter term, 1985)

		District 1 Schools			District 2 Schools		
Item	Year	Adam	Buch	Cool	Dear	Engl	Fair
Full-day absences:							
Mean Days per Student	1984	5.29	4.08	4.02	2.64	2.71	2.99
	1985	5.08	3.26	4.03	*	*	*
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	13	10	10	5	5	5
	1985	12	8	9	*	*	*
Half-day absences:							
Mean Days per Student	1984	11.56	10.18	11.27	*	*	*
	1985	9.61	9.19	11.20	*	*	*
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	28	24	26	*	*	*
	1985	22	21	26	*	*	*
Average periods missed each class:							
Mean Periods per Student	1984	7.74	5.95	6.59	6.36	5.23	6.10
	1985	7.10	5.65	6.59	6.48	5.74	6.08
Percentage of Days in Term**	1984	18	13	15	11	9	11
	1985	17	13	15	11	10	10
No. of students enrolled:	1984	957	1006	1259	1209	1262	1578
	1985	934	1026	1330	1135	1155	1444

* Half-day absence data for District 2 schools is unreliable and hence omitted; full-day absence data for District 2 schools unavailable in 1985.

** Spring term, 1984, included 45 days in District 1 and 57 days in District 2; winter term, 1985, included 43 days in District 1 and 60 days in District 2.

Appendix B: Adjustment of Statistics on Skipping

As mentioned in Section IV under Students' Compliance with Attendance Rules, interpretation of school statistics on student responses to the question about the number of days skipped since the last vacation was complicated each year by differences in the dates on which the questionnaire was administered in different schools.

In 1984, questionnaire administration dates spanned a two-week period. The number of days a student could have skipped--i.e., days since spring break--ranged from 16 at Coolidge to 25 at Adams. In 1985, questionnaire administration dates spanned only a week, but differences in when Christmas vacation ended for District 1 and District 2 added further variation in the numbers of days included in the time period referenced by the questionnaire item. Hence the number of days in 1985 ranged from 35 at Buchanan to 43 at Fairweather. These figures are summarized in Table B-1.

The method chosen for adjusting percentages and means to compensate (however inexactly) for these differences among schools was to assign each school a ratio each year computed as the number of days for that school divided by the shortest number of days for any school that year. Then percentages and means were divided by this ratio. Thus statistics for the school with the shortest number of days each year were divided by 1 and thus remained the same, whereas all others decreased somewhat. Unadjusted and adjusted percentages and means are reported in Table B-1.

As mentioned in the main text, we thought it unnecessary to make further adjustment to the 1985 scores to make them comparable to the 1984 scores, because the response options in 1985 compensated for this difference. We expected the 1985 statistics actually to be lower than the 1984 statistics, because skipping was reputed to be less frequent during the cold, rainy days of winter than the warm, sunny days in spring. The unadjusted

scores on skipping in 1985, however, were generally higher than in 1984. The exceptions were at Adams and Buchanan, where virtually the same percentages (58-57 percent at Adams and 30 percent at Buchanan) of students each year admitted they had skipped since the last vacation.

Table B-1
Students' Reports of Skipping School: Adjustments
(Percentage of students agreeing with questionnaire items and mean* of student responses in six schools in 1984 and 1985)

Questionnaire Item		(Year)	District 1 Schools: Adam	Buch	Cool	District 2 Schools: Dear	Engl	Fair
33. Since spring break, how many full days of school have you skipped without an excuse**	% any:	(84)	58	30	25	26	24	28
	adj. % any:	(84)	37	23	25	23	23	24
	mean:	(84)	1.50	0.72	0.80	0.55	0.49	1.57
	adj. mean:	(84)	0.96	0.55	0.80	0.49	0.46	0.48
37. Since Christmas break, how many full days of school have you skipped without an excuse**	% any:	(85)	57	30	44	39	34	40
	adj. % any:	(85)	55	30	40	34	29	33
	mean:	(85)	1.04	0.59	0.72	0.63	0.52	0.55
	adj. mean:	(85)	1.01	0.59	0.65	0.55	0.44	0.45
Number of students in sample		(84)	713	808	925	1051	1055	1247
		(85)	755	792	967	916	906	1246

*Means were calculated using these values for item responses:
33: 0=no days; 1=1 day; 2=2 days; 3=3 days; 4=4 or more days
37: 0=no days; 1=1-3 days; 2=4-5 days; 3=6-7 days; 4=8 or more days

**Number of school days in period covered by question about skipping and ratios to shortest period (underlined)

	(84)	25	21	16	18	17	19
		1.56	1.31	1.00	1.12	1.06	1.19
	(85)	36	35	39	40	41	43
		1.03	1.00	1.11	1.14	1.17	1.23

Appendix C

School Absenteeism Study

Dear Teacher,

Your school is part of a study being conducted by the University of Oregon to look at student attendance and programs to improve attendance. As part of the study, we are asking all teachers and students in a number of Oregon high schools to complete the enclosed questionnaires. We hope that results from the study will shed light on the problems of attendance and the way schools deal with these problems in the future.

The benefit to your school will come from a case study of patterns of student absenteeism and policies and practices that might reduce absenteeism. Data will include summaries of school records and of teacher and student responses to questionnaires. In addition, the study will contribute $200 to your school's fund.

Enclosed you will find the following materials: an envelope containing a teacher questionnaire, printed on both sides, along with a machine-readable answer form and an extra, colored page on which you may volunteer for an interview and write comments about promising practices.

If you have a class during the period that the school has scheduled for student questionnaire administration, you will also find a set of student questionnaires, also printed on both sides; machine-readable answer forms precoded with students' names; and extra, colored pages on which students may volunteer for interviews and write comments about student absenteeism.

We ask your cooperation in the following:

Please fill out the answer form to the teacher questionnaire. It should take no longer than 20 minutes. The answer form has your code number on it only for our data analysis. No one in this school or school district will see your answers. The extra page is for you to share your own experience and ideas in managing absenteeism. We also invite you to volunteer, if you wish, for a 20-minute interview, to be held before the end of the school year, with one of the project staff. Return your materials in the envelope to the office by next Monday.

At the beginning of the period scheduled by your school, please give each student a questionnaire, the answer form with his or her name on it, and an extra colored page. There are two unnamed forms for students we may have missed; please ask these students to print their names in the upper left corner of the form. Please instruct your students to use a #2 pencil to fill in the circles on the answer form. The student questionnaire will take 20 minutes to complete. We have assured students that their answers will be confidential, so please see that no one looks at answer sheets as they are returned to the large envelope. Return all completed forms in the envelope to the school office by the end of the day and any extra forms by the end of the week. A project staff member will pick up the envelopes there.

All information collected on these answer sheets will be held in strictest confidence. The use of codes or names on forms is solely for our data management needs. Answer sheets will be destroyed once the data is on the computer. No report, oral or written, of project results will identify individual students or teachers.

Thank you very much for your time and effort.

John deJung

Kenneth Duckworth

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY—TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Teacher: Please see the cover letter for directions. Questions are printed on both sides of this page. Use the enclosed form to mark your answers. For questions 1-14, select the answer that is most accurate for you and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on your answer form.

1. How many years have you been teaching at this school?

   (A) Ten or more years
   (B) Six to nine years
   (C) Three to five years
   (D) One or two years
   (E) Less than a year

2. How many years have you been teaching altogether?

   (A) Ten or more years
   (B) Six to nine years
   (C) Three to five years
   (D) One or two years
   (E) Less than a year

3. How many classes do you teach on an average day?

   (A) One to three
   (B) Four
   (C) Five
   (D) Six or more
   (E) Other or does not apply

4. How many of your students would you say are likely to go on to a four-year college?

   (A) About 10% or fewer
   (B) About 20-30%
   (C) About 40-50%
   (D) About 60-70%
   (E) About 80% or more

5. How many of your students would you say are interested in the subjects you teach?

   (A) About 10% or fewer
   (B) About 20-30%
   (C) About 40-50%
   (D) About 60-70%
   (E) About 80% or more

6. How would you compare the number of unexcused absences in your classes in this school this year to the number in the last couple of years?

   (A) More than before
   (B) Less than before
   (C) About the same
   (D) New here; don't know

7. How would you compare the number of tardies in your classes in this school this year to the number in the last couple of years?

   (A) More than before
   (B) Less than before
   (C) About the same
   (D) New here; don't know

8. How often do you give homework assignments in most of your classes?

   (A) Almost never
   (B) Less than once a week
   (C) About once a week
   (D) About 2-3 times a week
   (E) Almost daily

9. Thinking about all your classes, how many students are tardy on an average day?

   (A) Almost none
   (B) Fewer than 10%
   (C) About 10%
   (D) About 20%
   (E) More than 20%

10. Thinking about all your classes, how many students are absent on an average day?

    (A) Fewer than 10%
    (B) About 10%
    (C) About 20%
    (D) About 30%
    (E) More than 30%

11. How would you describe the way administrators at your school enforce penalties for unexcused absences?

    (A) Generally strict
    (B) Generally lenient
    (C) Strict in some cases, lenient in others
    (D) Neither strict nor lenient
    (E) Don't know

12. How much of your school day is taken up with identifying, recording, and following up on class absences or tardies?

    (A) One hour or more
    (B) About 45 minutes
    (C) About 30 minutes
    (D) About 15 minutes
    (E) About 10 minutes or less

13. How many student absences would you say are for reasons you regard as legitimate?

    (A) About one in five or less
    (B) About two in five
    (C) About three in five
    (D) About four in five
    (E) Nearly all

14. In your estimation, how important is it that students learn how to make their own decisions about obeying rules?

    (A) Not especially important
    (B) Somewhat important
    (C) Fairly important
    (D) Very important

PLEASE TURN TO THE OTHER SIDE AFTER YOU FINISH THIS SIDE

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For questions 15-20, please select the letter that best describes your practice and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on the answer form.	As a regular procedure	On occasion	Hardly ever	Does not apply
15. How often do you call the student's home for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
16. How often do you inform the student's counselor for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
17. How often do you keep the student after school or assign other penalties for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
18. How often do you reduce the student's grade for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
19. How often do you keep the student after school or assign other penalties for tardiness?	A	B	C	D
20. How often do you provide special help to students outside class time when they have done poorly on work?	A	B	C	D

Next, please select the letter that best describes how much you agree or disagree with statements 21-39 and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on the answer form.	Strongly Agree A	Agree B	Disagree C	Strongly Disagree D
21. I am satisfied with the support I get from administrators and counselors in handling class absence problems.	A	B	C	D
22. I strictly enforce the rules on attendance in my class.	A	B	C	D
23. Recording student tardiness is a low-pay-off and time-consuming chore.	A	B	C	D
24. If we want to reduce class cutting, we need stronger penalties.	A	B	C	D
25. If all teachers would regularly enforce attendance rules, we would quickly see a reduction in absences.	A	B	C	D
26. The school is better off when chronically-absent students simply drop out of school or transfer.	A	B	C	D
27. Class tardiness is a problem in this school.	A	B	C	D
28. Class cutting is a problem in this school.	A	B	C	D
29. I am concerned to be as accurate as possible in my daily attendance records.	A	B	C	D
30. No student who is frequently absent from class should be able to receive full credit or an A grade.	A	B	C	D
31. Students who work at it can get around the penalties for class cutting and tardiness.	A	B	C	D
32. I have the reputation of being a teacher who makes heavy demands on students.	A	B	C	D
33. It is important to me that my students attend class on time.	A	B	C	D
34. Our school administrators have provided effective leadership in dealing with attendance problems.	A	B	C	D
35. Parents help me in reducing student absences from my classes.	A	B	C	D
36. I believe in sticking to my schedule of content to be covered in class rather than slowing the pace of instruction for students who are behind.	A	B	C	D
37. I believe that the school has a special responsibility to students who are failing their schoolwork.	A	B	C	D
38. I adopt different learning goals and grading criteria for students who consistently do poorly on tests and assignments.	A	B	C	D
39. I enjoy teaching in this school.	A	B	C	D

NEXT, PLEASE SEE THE COLORED SHEET FOR LISTING "PROMISING PRACTICES" AND/OR FOR VOLUNTEERING FOR AN INTERVIEW.

School Code ____
Teacher Code ____

EXTRA PAGE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Teacher: This page is for you to write comments about your own experience and ideas about reducing student class cutting and tardiness. We also wish to interview teachers about absenteeism in their school. Please write your name below if you are willing to be interviewed.

A. PROMISING PRACTICES FOR REDUCING CLASS CUTTING AND TARDINESS

Please tell us, from your experience or other personal knowledge, what you consider the most effective practices to reduce class cutting and tardiness. Feel free to discuss, elaborate, refer to others, and so on.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. VOLUNTEER FOR INTERVIEWS

I would be willing to talk with a member of the project staff this spring about student absenteeism in my high school. This interview will take no more than 20 minutes.

Name _____

Major Subjects Taught _____

Best Way to Contact Me: Phone _____ Time of Day _____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY. PLEASE RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE, ANSWER FORM, AND THIS PAGE IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE BY NEXT MONDAY.

April 1984

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY—STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Student: We are conducting a study at several Oregon high schools. We are asking all students at your school to complete this questionnaire. We would like to know about rules and reasons for student absence. No one at your school will ever see your answers, so please answer honestly and completely.

Questions are printed on both sides of this page. Mark your answers on the separate answer form. Use a #2 pencil. For questions 1-22, decide how much you agree or disagree. For each question number, mark the circle with the matching letter on the answer form.

	Strongly Agree A	Agree B	Disagree C	Strongly Disagree D
1. I fully intend to graduate from high school.	A	B	C	D
2. What I learn in high school has a lot to do with what I will be able to do afterwards in my life.	A	B	C	D
3. I generally find it easy to earn passing grades.	A	B	C	D
4. If I had a choice, I would not go to school at all.	A	B	C	D
5. A lot of my friends have either dropped out of high school or probably will drop out before graduating.	A	B	C	D
6. I spend a lot of time at school in sports, music activities, clubs, or crafts.	A	B	C	D
7. My parents or guardians keep track of what and how I am doing in high school.	A	B	C	D
8. I get along well with my parents or guardians.	A	B	C	D
9. I am well informed about the penalties for skipping school, cutting classes, or being tardy to classes.	A	B	C	D
10. Getting to class on time is a real problem for me.	A	B	C	D
11. If I cut class or skip school, it's usually with friends.	A	B	C	D
12. I am not bothered if I skip school some days.	A	B	C	D
13. I am not bothered if I cut a class sometimes.	A	B	C	D
14. Some teachers mark you for tardiness, but some don't seem to bother.	A	B	C	D
15. A lot of students are marked absent when they are really in class.	A	B	C	D
16. School rules about skipping whole days are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
17. School rules about cutting a class are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
18. School rules about tardiness are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
19. Attendance at school should not count for grades.	A	B	C	D
20. Stricter penalties would reduce skipping and cutting.	A	B	C	D
21. Skipping school should be up to the student to decide, with no penalties.	A	B	C	D
22. My teachers spend extra time outside class helping me if I have trouble with schoolwork.	A	B	C	D

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For questions 23-38, please select the answer that fits you best, and fill in the matching circle on the answer form.

23. My main classes are in:

(A) College prep. subjects
(B) Business
(C) Industrial Arts or Home Economics
(D) Other subjects
(E) No special subjects

24. After high school, I expect to:

(A) Get a full-time job or join military
(B) Go to a 4-year college
(C) Go to a 2-year college or voc. program
(D) Other plans
(E) No special plans

25. After high school, my parents or guardians would like me to:

(A) Get a full-time job or join military
(B) Go to a 4-year college
(C) Go to a 2-year college or voc. program
(D) Other plans
(E) No special plans

26. If you have a part-time job, how many hours do you work a week?

(A) More than 20 hours a week
(B) About 20 hours a week
(C) About 10 hours a week
(D) Fewer than 10 hours a week
(E) I don't have a part-time job

27. A part-time job is important to me now:

(A) To pay for basic needs, like clothing
(B) To pay for special things, like a car
(C) To save up for after high school
(D) Other reasons
(E) It is not important

28. Most of my very best friends:

(A) Are in some classes with me
(B) Go to my school but not my classes
(C) Go to another high school
(D) Are out of school

29. My parents or guardians know where I am and what I am doing.

(A) Hardly ever
(B) Only some of the time
(C) Most of the time
(D) Nearly always

30. The lowest grade I would be satisfied with in most of my classes is:

(A) A
(B) B
(C) C
(D) D
(E) Don't know

31. How far did your parents or guardians go in school?

(A) Neither graduated from high school
(B) One or both graduated from high school
(C) One or both attended college
(D) One or both graduated from college
(E) Does not apply

32. About how often would you say you are tardy to class?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

33. Since spring break, how many full days do you remember being absent without an accepted excuse?

(A) Four or more days
(B) Three days
(C) Two days
(D) One day
(E) No days

34. What is the biggest reason you would skip a day of school?

(A) Homework not ready
(B) Needed at home
(C) Something better to do
(D) Having a bad day
(E) None of these are reasons for me

35. How often do you think most of your friends cut classes in this school?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

36. Not counting full-day absences, about how often would you say you cut a class?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week.
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

37. What is the biggest reason you would cut a class?

(A) Class not interesting
(B) Homework not ready
(C) Something else more important to do
(D) Having a bad day
(E) None of these are reasons for me

38. What is the biggest reason you would not cut a class?

(A) Teacher would find out
(B) Too much work to make up
(C) Parents or guardians would find out
(D) Detention or other penalty
(E) None of these are reasons for me

IF YOU HAVE TIME, ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ON THE COLORED PAGE. YOU MAY VOLUNTEER FOR AN INTERVIEW. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR BEING PART OF THIS STUDY. PLEASE RETURN ALL MATERIALS AS YOUR TEACHER DIRECTS.

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EXTRA QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Dear Student: This page is extra, if you have time. Please answer questions A, B, and C on this page. Also, we would like to interview a few students. The interview will take place at your school and will last 15 minutes. It will be confidential. Please print your name, grade, and teacher next to D if you wish to volunteer.

A. If you ever cut classes, list classes you would cut most often and the reasons.

Name of Class	Reasons I Would Cut This Class
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

B. If you ever cut classes, list classes you would cut least often and the reasons.

Name of Class	Reasons I Would Not Cut This Class
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

C. What are the reasons you think students would skip a whole day of school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

D. VOLUNTEER FOR INTERVIEW: I would be willing to talk with the persons conducting this study about student absences at my school.

Print Name _____ Grade _____

Reg. or Guide Teacher's Name _____

Appendix D

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Enclosure II

School Absenteeism Study

Dear Teacher,

As you likely know from participating last year, your school is part of a study being conducted by the University of Oregon to look at student attendance and programs to improve attendance. As part of the study, last year we asked all teachers and students in a number of Oregon high schools to complete the enclosed questionnaires. This is a follow up on that questionnaire. Most of the questions are the same to permit comparisons for the two years but a few new questions have been added. We are again asking all teachers and students to complete this second round of questionnaires whether they were part of last year's administration or not. We hope that results from the study will shed light on the problems of attendance and the way schools deal with these problems in the future, and possibly suggest policies and practices that might reduce absenteeism in your school. In addition, the study has contributed $200 to your school's fund.

Enclosed you will find the following materials: your teacher questionnaire, printed on both sides, along with a machine-readable answer form and an extra, colored page on which you may write comments about ways in which your school is (or could) reduce absenteeism.

If you have a class during the period that the school has scheduled for student questionnaire administration, you will also find a set of student questionnaires and a set of machine-readable answer forms precoded with students' names.

We ask your cooperation in the following:

Please complete your questionnaire by "bubbling in" your answers on the answer page marked TEACHER. It should take no longer than 15 minutes. The answer form has your code number on it only for our data analysis. No one in this school or school district will see your answers. The colored page is optional. It is for you to share your own experience and ideas in managing absenteeism. We ask you to return your answer page and comments page in the envelope with the completed student answer sheets to your office.

Directions for Student Administration. At the beginning of the period scheduled by your school, please give each student a questionnaire and the answer page with his or her name on it. We have included a few UNNAMED answer pages for students we may have missed; please ask these students to print their names in the upper left corner of the form. Please instruct your students to use a #2 pencil to fill in the circles on the answer form. The student questionnaire will take 15 minutes to complete. We have assured students that their answers will be confidential, so please see that no one looks at answer sheets as they are returned to the large envelope. Return all completed forms in the envelope together with your own teacher answer pages to the school office by the end of the day and any extra forms by the end of the week. A project staff member will pick up the envelopes there.

All information collected on these answer sheets will be held in strictest confidence. The use of codes or names on forms is solely for our data management needs. Answer sheets will be destroyed once the data has been analyzed. No report, oral or written, of project results will identify individual students or teachers.

Thank you very much for your time and effort.

John deJung

John deJung

Kenneth Duckworth

Kenneth Duckworth

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SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY--TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE (February 1985)

Dear Teacher: Please see the cover letter for directions. Use the enclosed answer sheet marked TEACHER to record your answers. For questions 1-14, select the answer that is most accurate for you and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on your answer page.

1. How many years have you been teaching at this school?

   (A) Ten or more years
   (B) Six to nine years
   (C) Three to five years
   (D) One or two years
   (E) Less than a year

2. How many years have you been teaching altogether?

   (A) Ten or more years
   (B) Six to nine years
   (C) Three to five years
   (D) One or two years
   (E) Less than a year

3. How many classes do you teach on an average day?

   (A) One to three
   (B) Four
   (C) Five
   (D) Six or more
   (E) Other or does not apply

4. How many of your students would you say are likely to go on to a four-year college?

   (A) About 10% or fewer
   (B) About 20-30%
   (C) About 40-50%
   (D) About 60-70%
   (E) About 80% or more

5. How many of your students would you say are interested in the subjects you teach?

   (A) About 10% or fewer
   (B) About 20-30%
   (C) About 40-50%
   (D) About 60-70%
   (E) About 80% or more

6. How would you compare the number of unexcused absences in your classes in this school this year to those of last year?

   (A) More than last year
   (B) Less than last year
   (C) About the same
   (D) New here; don't know

7. How would you compare the number of tardies in your classes in this school this year to those last year?

   (A) More than last year
   (B) Less than last year
   (C) About the same
   (D) New here; don't know

8. How often do you give homework assignments in most of your classes?

   (A) Almost never
   (B) Less than once a week
   (C) About once a week
   (D) About 2-3 times a week
   (E) Almost daily

9. Thinking about all your classes, how many students are tardy on an average day?

   (A) Almost none
   (B) Fewer than 10%
   (C) About 10%
   (D) About 20%
   (E) More than 20%

10. Thinking about all your classes, how many students are absent on an average day?

    (A) Fewer than 10%
    (B) About 10%
    (C) About 20%
    (D) About 30%
    (E) More than 30%

11. How would you describe the way administrators at your school enforce penalties for unexcused absences?

    (A) Generally strict
    (B) Generally lenient
    (C) Strict in some cases, lenient in others
    (D) Neither strict nor lenient
    (E) Don't know

12. How much of your school day is taken up with identifying, recording, and following up on class absences or tardies?

    (A) One hour or more
    (B) About 45 minutes
    (C) About 30 minutes
    (D) About 15 minutes
    (E) About 10 minutes or less

13. How many student absences would you say are for reasons you regard as legitimate?

    (A) About one in five or less
    (B) About two in five
    (C) About three in five
    (D) About four in five
    (E) Nearly all

14. In your opinion, which would have the most payoff in your school in reducing absences?

    (A) Schoolwide enforcement of a make up TIME penalty
    (B) Automatic grade or credit reduction of absences
    (C) Dropping distinctions between excused and unexcused absences
    (D) More rapid return of absentee lists to teachers
    (E) None of these would help much

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For questions 15-20, please select the letter that best describes your practice and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on the answer page.	As a regular procedure	On occasion	Hardly ever	Does not apply
15. How often do you call the student's home for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
16. How often do you inform the student's counselor for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
17. How often do you keep the student after school or assign other penalties for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
18. How often do you reduce the student's grade for repeated unexcused absences?	A	B	C	D
19. How often do you keep the student after school or assign other penalties for tardiness?	A	B	C	D
20. How often do you provide special help to students outside class time when they have done poorly on work?	A	B	C	D

Next, please select the letter that best describes how much you agree or disagree with statements 21-40 and mark the corresponding letter next to the question number on the answer page.	Strongly Agree A	Agree B	Disagree C	Strongly Disagree D
21. I am satisfied with the support I get from administrators and counselors in handling class absence problems.	A	B	C	D
22. I strictly enforce the rules on attendance in my class.	A	B	C	D
23. Recording student tardiness is a low-pay-off and time-consuming chore.	A	B	C	D
24. If we want to reduce class cutting, we need stronger penalties.	A	B	C	D
25. If all teachers would regularly enforce attendance rules, we would quickly see a reduction in absences.	A	B	C	D
26. The school is better off when chronically-absent students simply drop out of school or transfer.	A	B	C	D
27. Class tardiness is a problem in this school.	A	B	C	D
28. Class cutting is a problem in this school.	A	B	C	D
29. I am concerned to be as accurate as possible in my daily attendance records.	A	B	C	D
30. No student who is frequently absent from class should be able to receive full credit or an A grade.	A	B	C	D
31. Students who work at it can get around the penalties for class cutting and tardiness.	A	B	C	D
32. I have the reputation of being a teacher who makes heavy demands on students.	A	B	C	D
33. It is important to me that my students attend class on time.	A	B	C	D
34. Our school administrators have provided effective leadership in dealing with attendance problems.	A	B	C	D
35. Parents help me in reducing student absences from my classes.	A	B	C	D
36. I believe in sticking to my schedule of content to be covered in class rather than slowing the pace of instruction for students who are behind.	A	B	C	D
37. I believe that the school has a special responsibility to students who are failing their schoolwork.	A	B	C	D
38. I adopt different learning goals and grading criteria for students who consistently do poorly on tests and assignments.	A	B	C	D
39. I believe I have class cutting reasonably well controlled in my classes.	A	B	C	D
40. The "seeds of truancy" are generally sown before high school career and we can hardly be expected to reverse the situation.	A	B	C	D

School Code _____
Teacher Code _____

EXTRA PAGE FOR TEACHERS

Dear teacher: last year we were able to interview a small number (10) of teachers in each school about absenteeism. Reduced funding this year has obliged us to limit ourselves to collecting written remarks.

This page is for you to write comments about your own experience and ideas about reducing student absences and tardiness. Again we wish to thank you for your participation and hope that our reporting of project findings (as summaries due December 1985) will be of help in your school.

A. CHANGES IN SCHOOL PRACTICES

Please tell us of any rules or practices pertaining to school attendance (including class lateness) which your school may have initiated or expanded (or discontinued) this school year, and how these changes may have affected you and your classes and your school, in general.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B. RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Are there some rules or practices (for improving attendance) which you believe your school should adopt?

_____

_____

_____

We welcome any of your additional comments.

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY. PLEASE RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE, ANSWER PAGE, AND THIS PAGE IN THE ENVELOPE WITH YOUR CLASS'S COMPLETED ANSWER SHEETS TO YOUR SCHOOL OFFICE.

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SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY—STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE (February, 1985)

Dear Student: This is the second and last year of a study we are doing at several Oregon high schools. We are again asking all students at your school to complete this questionnaire. We would like to know about rules and reasons for student absence. No one at your school will ever see your answers, so please answer honestly and completely.

Questions are printed on both sides of this page. Mark your answers on the separate answer page. Use a #2 pencil. For questions 1-26, decide how much you agree or disagree. For each question number, mark the circle with the matching letter on the answer form.

	Strongly Agree A	Agree B	Disagree C	Strongly Disagree D
1. What I learn in high school has a lot to do with what I will be able to do afterwards in my life.	A	B	C	D
2. I generally find it easy to earn passing grades.	A	B	C	D
3. In most of my classes being absent 2 or 3 times a month hardly effects my grade.	A	B	C	D
4. I am absent less from classes where attendance is carefully checked than from classes where it is easier not be noticed as absent.	A	B	C	D
5. If I had a choice, I would not go to school at all.	A	B	C	D
6. A lot of my friends have either dropped out of high school or probably will drop out before graduating.	A	B	C	D
7. I spend a lot of time at school in sports, music activities, clubs, or crafts.	A	B	C	D
8. My parents or guardians keep track of what and how I am doing in high school.	A	B	C	D
9. Getting to class on time is a real problem for me.	A	B	C	D
10. If I cut class or skip school, it's usually with friends.	A	B	C	D
11. I am not bothered if I skip school some days.	A	B	C	D
12. I am not bothered if I cut a class sometimes.	A	B	C	D
13. I am not bothered if I am late for class sometimes.	A	B	C	D
14. Some teachers mark you for tardiness, but some don't seem to bother.	A	B	C	D
15. A lot of students are not marked absent when they are not in class.	A	B	C	D
16. School rules about skipping whole days are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
17. School rules about cutting a class are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
18. School rules about tardiness are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
19. Attendance at school should not count for grades.	A	B	C	D
20. Stricter penalties would reduce skipping and cutting.	A	B	C	D
21. Skipping school should be up to the student to decide, with no penalties.	A	B	C	D
22. My parents or guardians would cover for me if I took a day off from school.	A	B	C	D
23. My teachers spend extra time outside class helping me if I have trouble with schoolwork.	A	B	C	D
24. My parents or guardians nearly always support me in things I want to do.	A	B	C	D
25. Most of the times I've cut a class, I've planned it at least the day before.	A	B	C	D
26. If I'm absent a lot from some of my classes, I probably won't graduate.	A	B	C	D

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For questions 27-42, please select the answer that fits you best, and fill in the matching circles on the answer page. Be sure to start with item 27 on your answer page.

27. My main classes are in:

(A) College prep. subjects
(B) Business
(C) Industrial Arts or Home Economics
(D) Other subjects
(E) No special subjects

28. After high school, I expect to:

(A) Get a full-time job or join military
(B) Go to a 4-year college
(C) Go to a 2-year college or voc. program
(D) Other plans
(E) No special plans

29. After high school, my parents or guardians would like me to:

(A) Get a full-time job or join military
(B) Go to a 4-year college
(C) Go to a 2-year college or voc. program
(D) Other plans
(E) No special plans

30. If you have a part-time job, how many hours do you work a week?

(A) More than 20 hours a week
(B) About 20 hours a week
(C) About 10 hours a week
(D) Fewer than 10 hours a week
(E) I don't have a part-time job

31. In your strictest class, how many days do you think you can miss during a trimester/semester and still get a passing grade?

(A) Up to 4 days
(B) Up to 6 days
(C) Up to 10 days
(D) Up to 15 days
(E) Being in class or not doesn't make a difference

32. In your least strict class, how many days do you think you can miss during a trimester/semester and still get a passing grade?

(A) Up to 4 days
(B) Up to 6 days
(C) Up to 10 days
(D) Up to 15 days
(E) Being in class or not doesn't make a difference

33. My parents or guardians know where I am and what I am doing.

(A) Hardly ever
(B) Only some of the time
(C) Most of the time
(D) Nearly always

34. The lowest grade I would be satisfied with in most of my classes is:

(A) A
(B) B
(C) C
(D) D
(E) Don't know

35. How far did your parents or guardians go in school?

(A) Neither graduated from high school
(B) One or both graduated from high school
(C) One or both attended college
(D) One or both graduated from college
(E) Does not apply

36. About how often would you say you are tardy to class?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

37. Since Christmas break, how many full days do you remember being absent without an accepted excuse?

(A) Eight or more days
(B) Six or seven days
(C) Four or five days
(D) One to three days
(E) No days

38. How many times since school started in September has a school counselor or administrator called you in to talk about skipping or cutting?

(A) No times
(B) Once
(C) Twice
(D) Three times
(E) More than three times

39. How often do you think most of your friends cut classes in this school?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

40. Not counting full-day absences, about how often would you say you cut a class?

(A) Five or more times a week
(B) Three or four times a week.
(C) Once or twice a week
(D) Less than once a week
(E) Hardly ever

41. There are approximately 65 school days left till the end of school in June. Approximately how many days would you guess you would be absent for any reason between now and then?

(A) None
(B) 1-3 days
(C) 4-5 days
(D) 6-7 days
(E) More than 8 days

42. What is the biggest reason you would not cut a class?

(A) Teacher would find out
(B) Too much work to make up
(C) Parents or guardians would find out
(D) Detention or other penalty
(E) None of these are reasons for me

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR BEING PART OF THIS STUDY. PLEASE [illegible] ALL MATERIALS AS YOUR TEACHER DIRECTS.